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BBC TopGear

JUNE 2025

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TG
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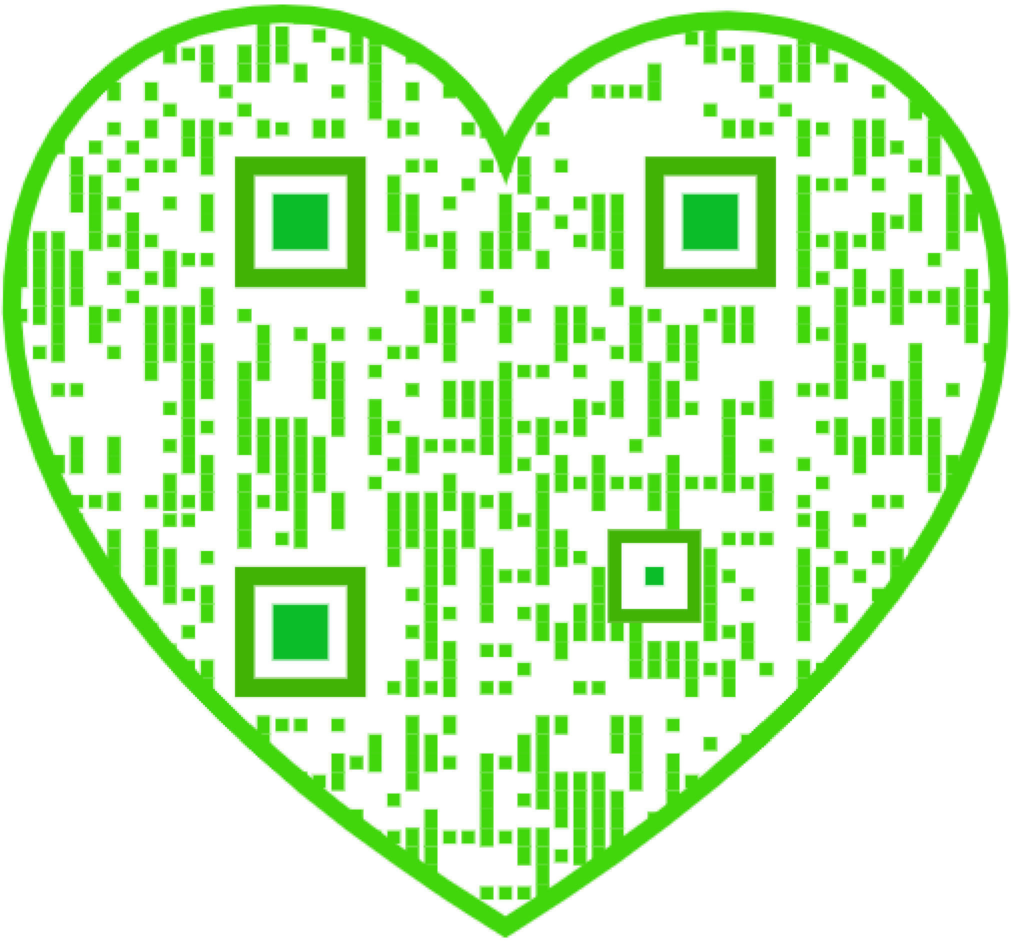

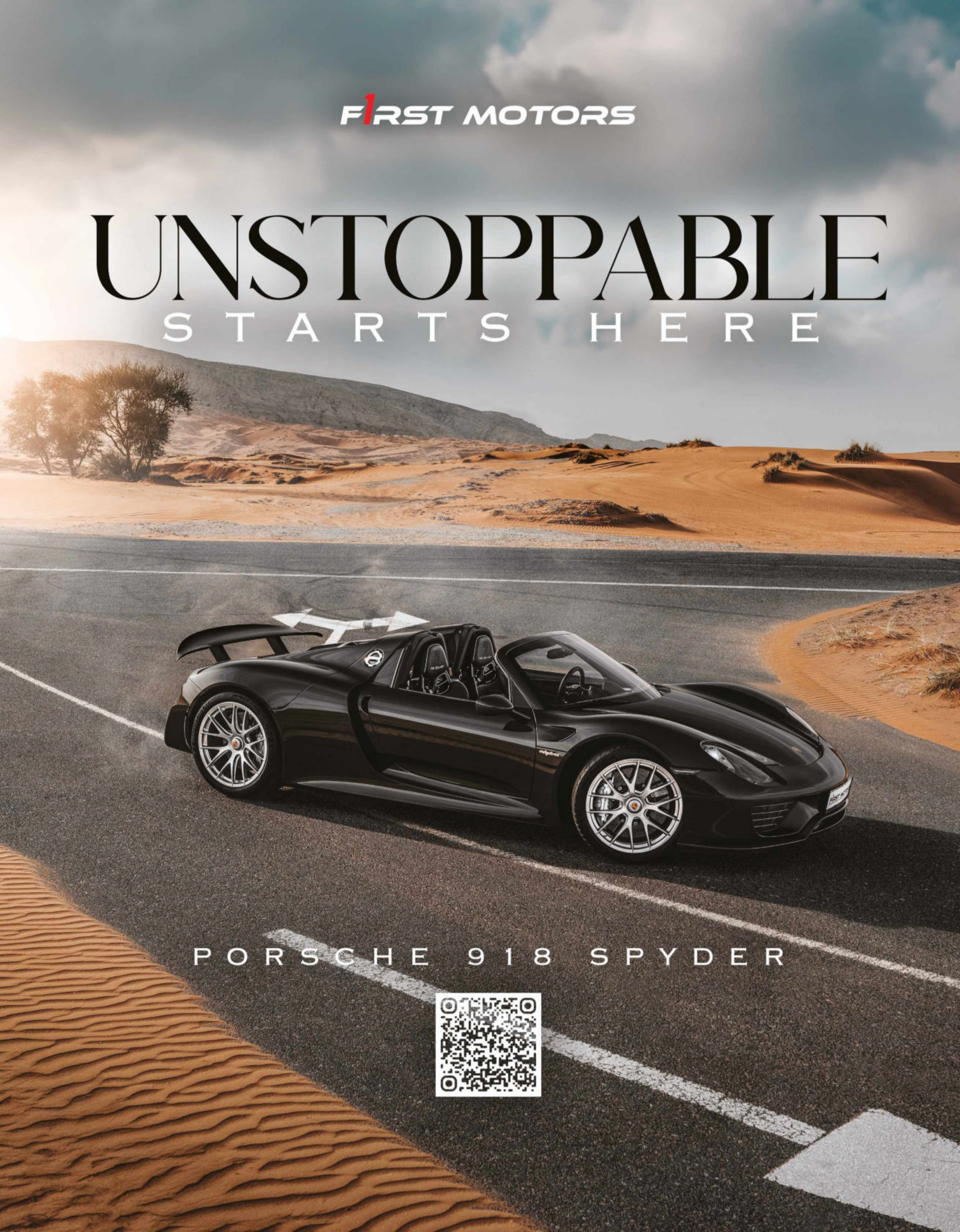
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STARTS HERE
PORSCHE 918 SPYDER

JACK RIX

Editor-in-chief

@jack_rix
@rixjack
jack.rix@bbctopgearmagazine.com

BBC TG
Issue 396

Sucker car, fan car, cheat code, call it what you like, but the McMurtry Spéirling has fundamentally shifted our understanding of aerodynamics, performance cars in general and how quickly something on four wheels can get around a racetrack without coming unstuck.

TopGear's relationship with McMurtry goes way back to Speed Week 2021 at Dunsfold, when we had the Spéirling along, but only for a static shoot. To be honest, it was little more than a lofty idea at that stage, a theoretical disruptor. Clearly it had the right financial backing and some incredibly smart people working on it, but did we think it would come to fruition? We did not.

Fast forward a year to the Goodwood Festival of Speed, and a little shoe shaped car breaks the 23 year old hillclimb record in a time of 39.08 seconds. The world stops in its tracks, rewinds the tape and tries to make sense of what it's seen. Outside of F1, it's not often a car going quickly becomes global news, but this made all the headlines.

We waited patiently as others drove it in a straight line, or around a car park… knowing the story we all craved was how it felt like to be strapped in and to pilot it around a racetrack. Ollie Marriage had the privilege of that first full test and delivered a story and a video that will remain a marker in the annals of car journalism.

But still, there was a piece of the puzzle missing. A record that by McMurtry's own admission it wanted more than any other – to be the fastest car ever around a bumpy airfield littered with drastic surface changes, drain covers, rotting tyres and faded white lines. It's not glamorous, but Stig lapping the *TG* track remains the fairest and most vivid comparison of a car's performance relative to its peers.

We knew it would be fast, we didn't know it would bring Dunsfold to its knees in 55.9secs, shattering the R24 F1 car's 2004 time by 3.1secs. I was there, it didn't feel real, like we'd slipped into the metaverse without realising. I'm not sure it'll ever be bettered.

Enjoy the issue,

Watch the historic lap here

CONTRIBUTORS

WHO: *CALLUM ALEXANDER*
Callum first came to *TopGear* on work experience, now he's here professionally… mainly as our historic VW correspondent

WHO: *JASON BARLOW*
Always ready for a combat situation, Jason was the natural choice to send on a mission to drive to the DMZ in Korea

WHO: *DEAN SMITH*
We needed a sensible foil to cross the Outback with inveterate thrillseeker Ollie Kew… Dean (middle) also takes nice pictures

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TopGear

JACK RIX
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

DEPUTY EDITOR Ollie Kew
HEAD OF CAR TESTING Oliver Marriage
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Tom Ford
CONSULTANT EDITOR Paul Horrell
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DIGITAL DIRECTOR Simon Bond
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SUB-EDITORS Sam Burnett, Peter Rawlins
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WEB PRODUCER Callum Alexander
HEAD OF CONTENT STRATEGY Rowan Horncastle
DIGITAL CONTENT PRODUCER Ben Pulman

ART TEAM
CREATIVE DIRECTOR Andy Franklin
ART EDITOR Elliott Webb

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Jethro Bovingdon, Mike Channell, Richard Holt, Sam Philip

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Lee Brimble, Mark Fagelson, Jonny Fleetwood, Wilson Hennessy, Rowan Horncastle, Olgun Kordal, Jamie Lipman, Dennis Noten, Richard Pardon, Mark Riccioni, Philipp Rupprecht, John Wycherley

HEAD OF CLIENTS AND STRATEGY Phil Holland
AGENCY ADVERTISING MANAGER Stacey Chiu
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GLOBAL DIRECTOR, MAGAZINES Mandy Thwaites
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DIGITAL VP, AUTOS Chris Mooney

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD Alex Renton

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PRINTED BY WALSTEAD ROCHE IN THE UK

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TURN TO PAGE 034

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THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

JUNE

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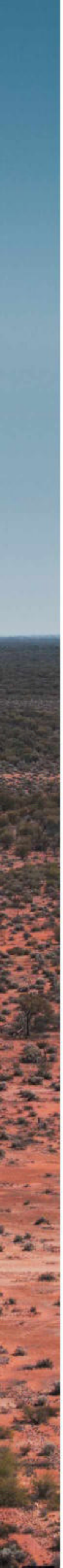

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013
CHLOE DOWSETT

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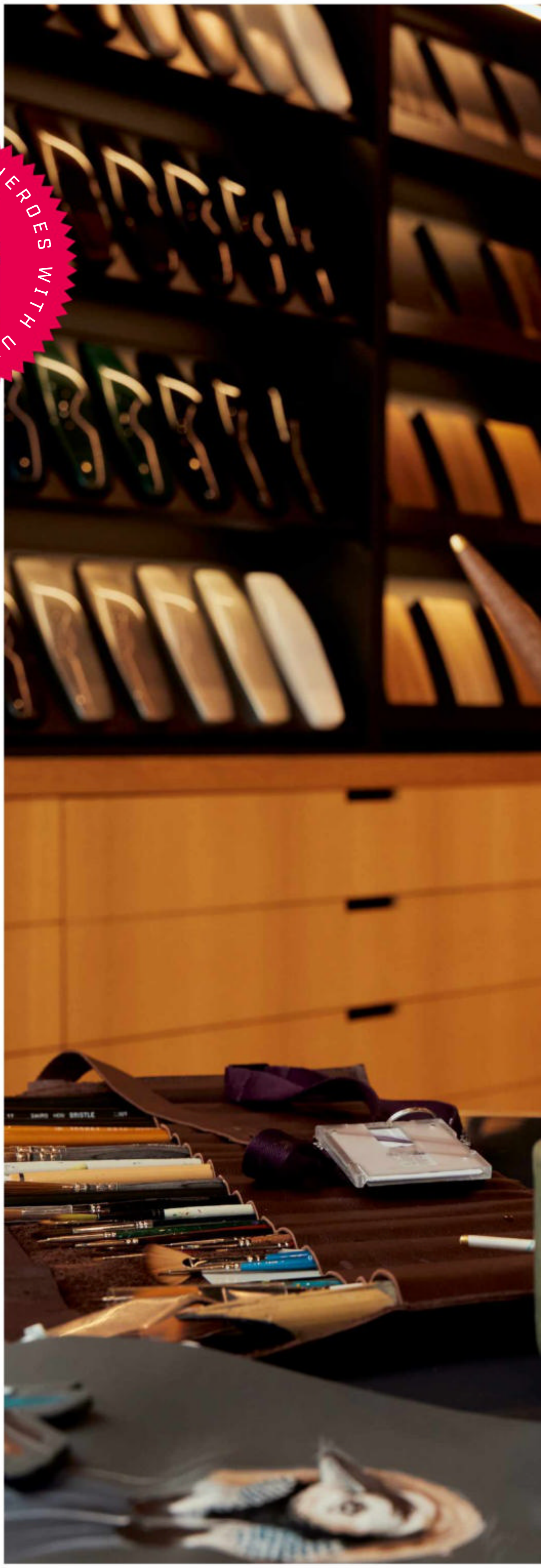
TRENDING

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT



Bank canvas

Meet Chloe Dowsett, the artist who can make Rolls-Royce owners' design dreams come true

WORDS JOE HOLDING
PHOTOS TOM BARNES

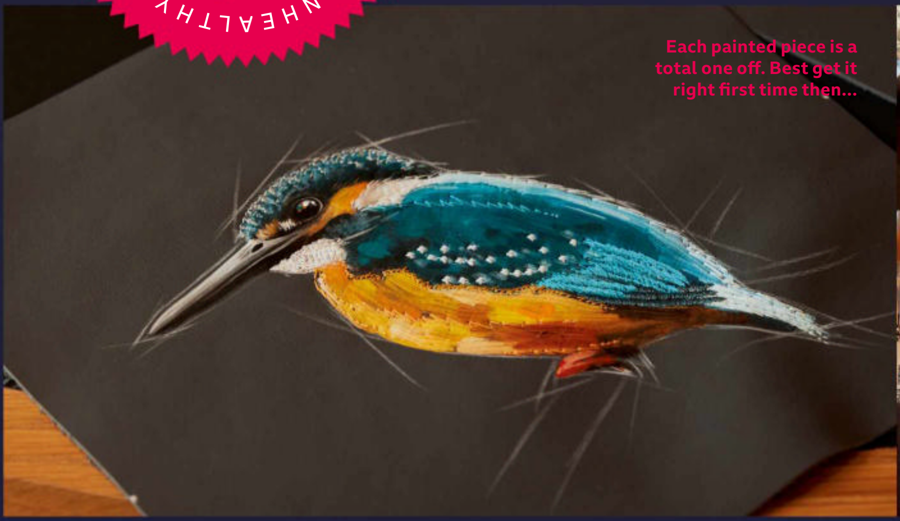
"There's bespoke and there's *bespoke*... and there's complete one-off bespoke, which is where we fit in." Chloe Dowsett is demonstrating how she provides Rolls-Royce's clients with *the* most bespoke interior detailing service since someone ushered Michelangelo into the Sistine Chapel and asked "Reckon you can make this gaff look mint?" In minutes she turns a chalk outline into the most vivid 2D kingfisher we've ever seen, so lifelike that it might leap off its leather canvas and flitter around the room.

Chloe works in the interior trim centre in a super secret studio deep within Rolls' Goodwood HQ, off limits to prying eyes and,

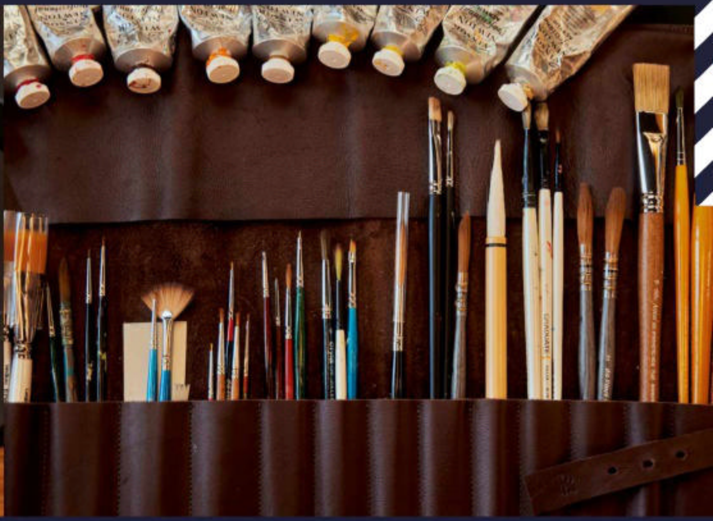
> “Chloe can turn her hand to almost any leather surface inside the car”

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT



Each painted piece is a total one off. Best get it right first time then...



er, *TopGear* photographers. To understand how she wound up there, we need to rewind. Born into a creative family, Chloe spent her childhood painting, drawing and sculpting. She was on Neil Buchanan's kids TV classic *Art Attack*, and her certificate for it hangs next to that of her art degree at home. "They are equally as important." Too right.

After her studies followed a string of jobs that took her as far afield as New York, and as niche as writing gags for a CGI reboot of *The Wombles* as one of the project's storyboard artists. She later started her own business doing everything from murals to signwriting, but began to panic she was saying yes to work that didn't represent her as an artist. "A fine artist wants to prove a point," she explains. "You're like a scientist. There's an intention. You have an idea and you want to create something out of it."

That led her to Rolls, initially sewing seats on the production line, and then on to the small team led by Mark Court, whose freehand coach lines have made him a cult hero.

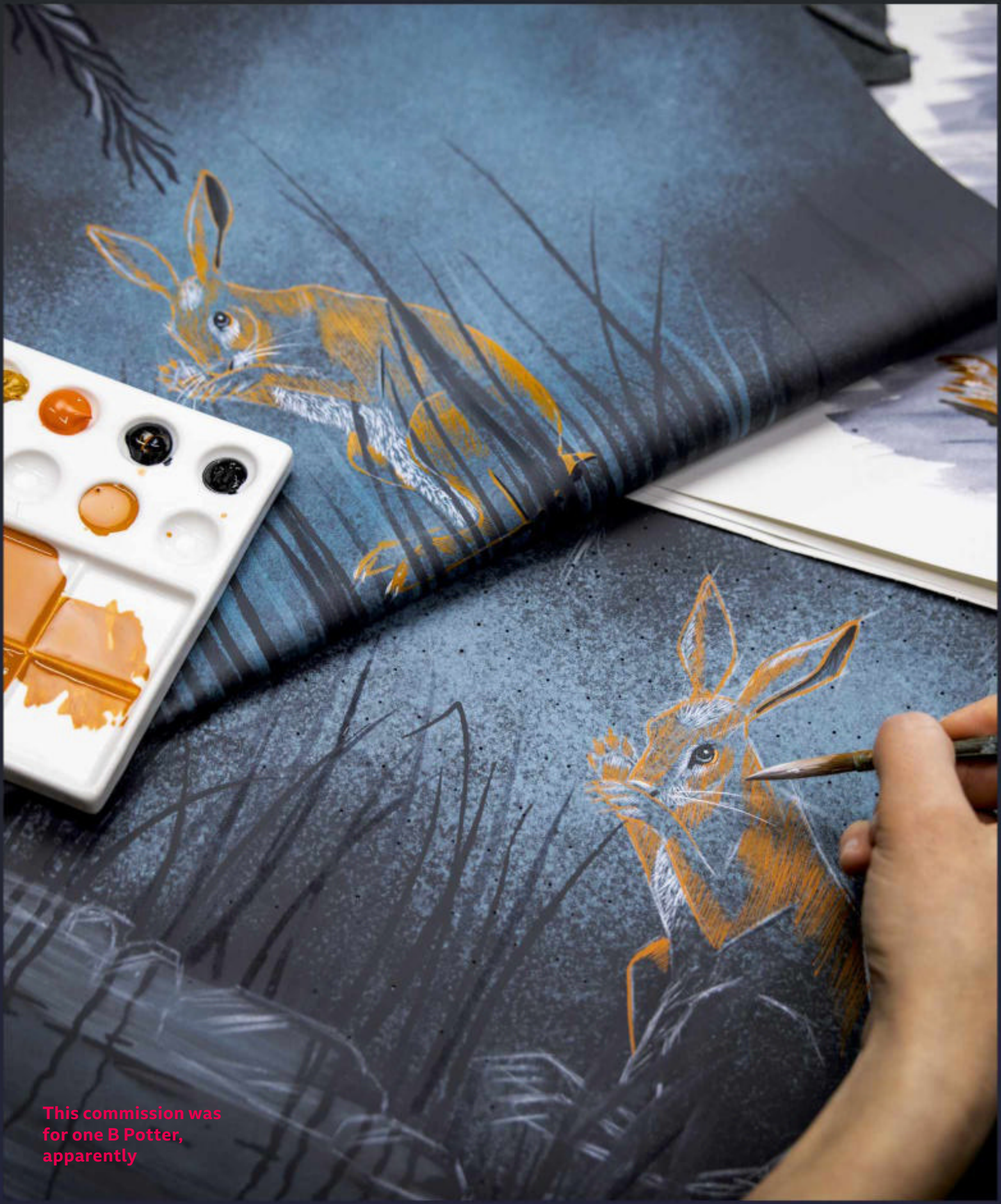
"Coach lining's like his baby," says Chloe. "He's so proud to be there and he wants it to be the best." Like an apprentice she studied him for months, getting hands on occasionally at first and then more frequently as she earned his trust. Chloe was used to using 10 per cent of a brush tip for her own art, but Mark taught her to lay the whole thing onto the car's surface. "It felt so alien," she explains.

"But you do, you have to push it all the way down to the bristle and pull it along so it almost pulls itself." It sounds like trying to copy someone's handwriting. "It's worse! There's no two goes at it. You can't practise on the side of a car. There is a lot of pressure."

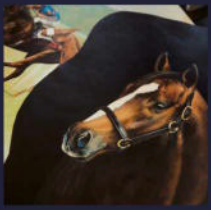
Chloe emerged with flying colours, absorbing Mark's sense of care and tradition in the process. "In my new job they call me the paintbrush police," she says of her scrupulous cleaning regime. "But how cool would it be in 30 years if I've got the brush I started with?" Very cool. And very Rolls.

So, the new job: if you want to treat the inside of your Phantom as the world's most sophisticated blank canvas, Chloe is who you call. She can turn her hand to almost any leather surface inside the car, from tiny embellishments to full headliners. They get all sorts of requests, but Rolls doesn't judge. "We're not the taste police," Chloe insists. "If you want it, you can have it."

Leather is stretchy, so Rolls spent years developing techniques with an acrylic paint that's applied before the leather's protective coating, for maximum durability. Its waxy surface means it absorbs the paint, but not to the point you lose the colour. The skin is textured, and ripples as it's painted, something that's now second nature to Chloe. "If I painted on paper it'd be strange."



This commission was for one B Potter, apparently

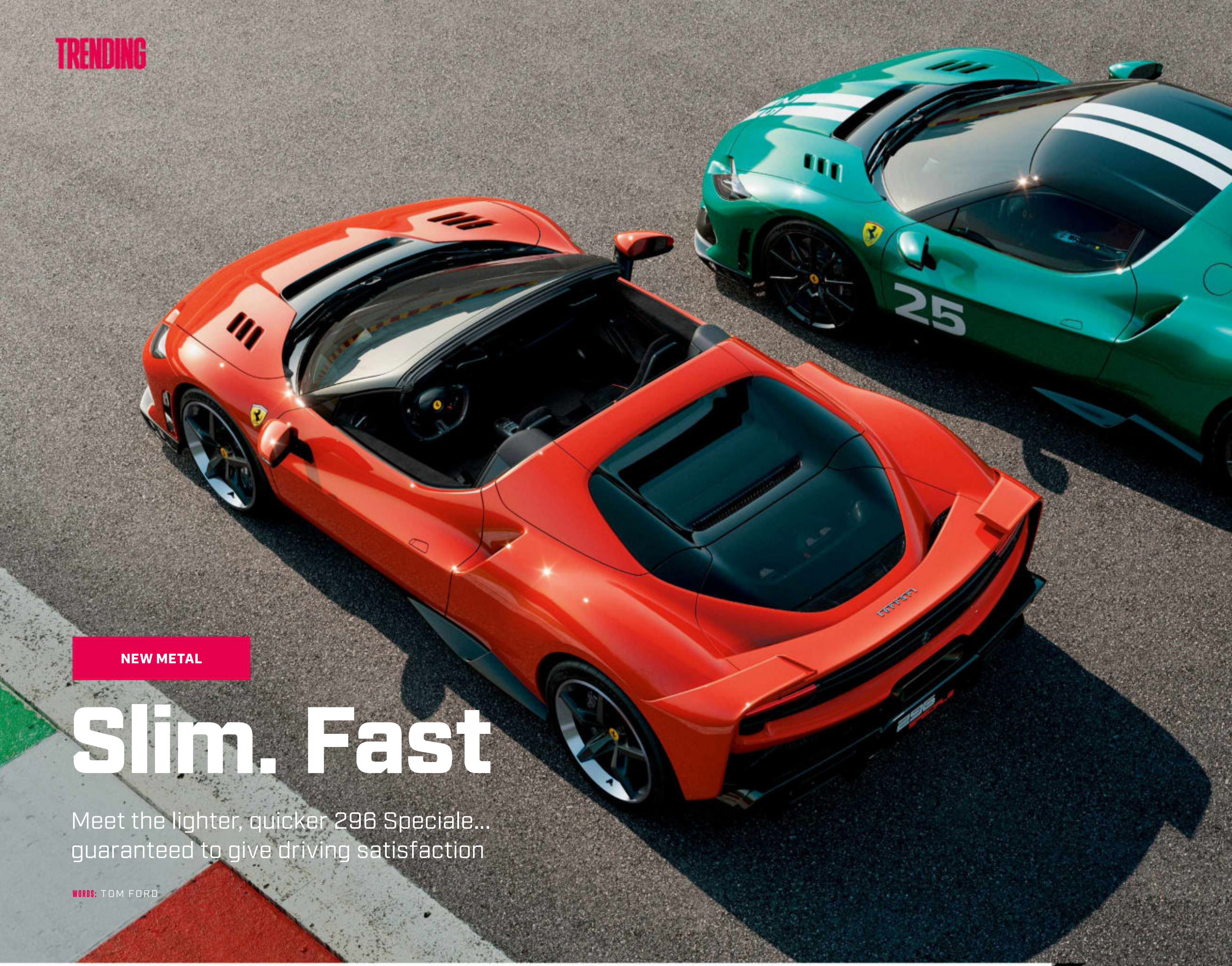


Want your pet immortalised on your R-R interior? Easy. Just consider resale values...

While Rolls' designers will often simply hand Chloe some requests and let her crack on, she does meet some customers to give her input. "The percentage of artistic licence we have is increasing all the time. You're buying into what we are able to do... and then you have to look at it every single day.

"If you want something abstract, let's celebrate paint because if you're doing something neat, you could print it. You could laser etch it. You could embroider it. We've got painters now, so let's celebrate translucency, accidental marks, brushstrokes. That's what's great about it, all painted cars are one offs."

In the future Chloe can see herself taking on the whole process from concept to application. "Ideally I'd bring my own artwork in and do a car that was my own design." You could call it the ultimate in creative freedom. Which is what all artists crave, right? "One hundred per cent. Always. It's such a curse."



NEW METAL

Slim. Fast

Meet the lighter, quicker 296 Speciale… guaranteed to give driving satisfaction

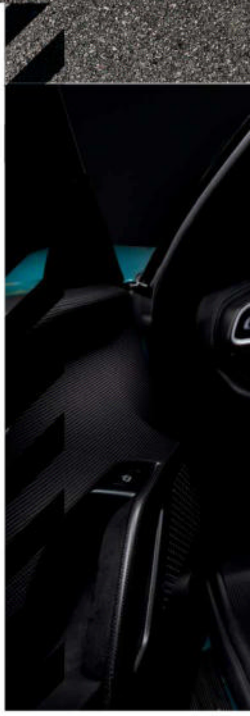
WORDS: TOM FORD

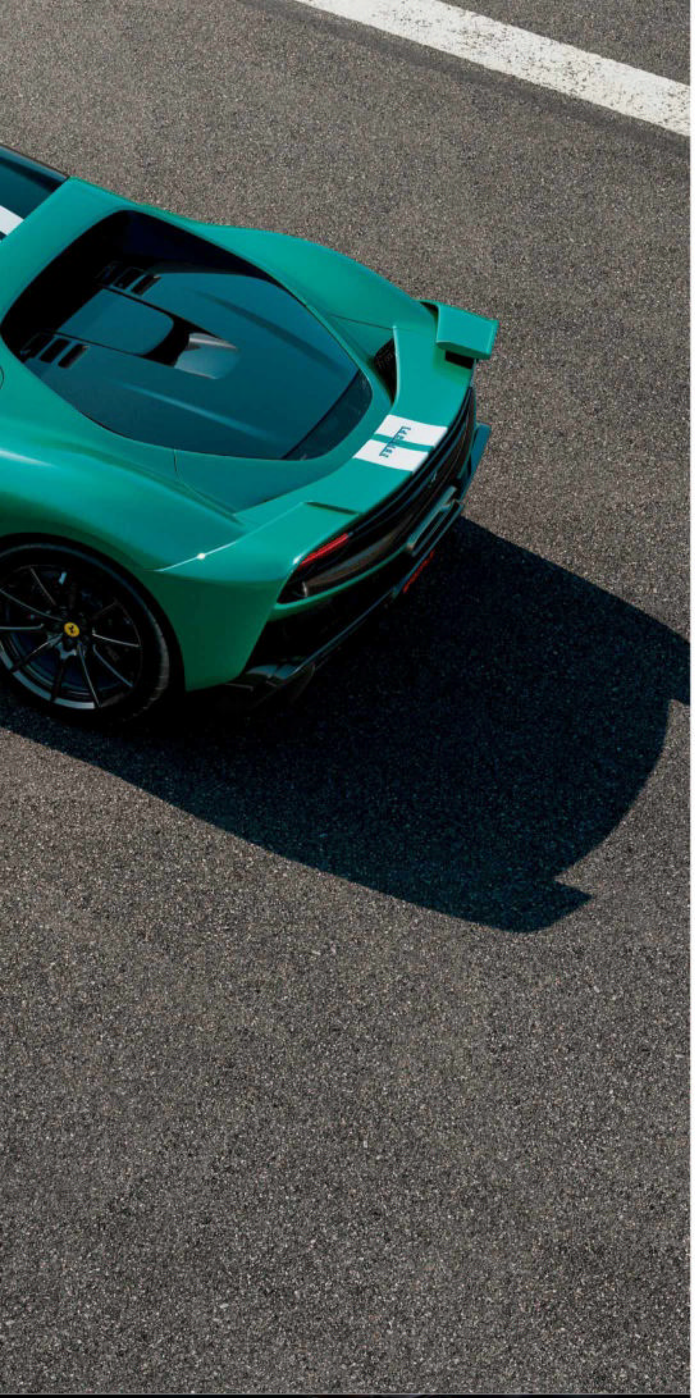
NO ONE, AFTER DRIVING FERRARI'S 818bhp 296 GTB hybrid, comes away saying, "What that needs is a bit less weight and a bit more power." Not a single person. Except, it seems, Ferrari engineers. Because the new Ferrari 296 Speciale has dropped 60kg and increased horsepower to 880bhp. OK, so they're relatively modest increases on what was an already very powerful 'baby' Ferrari, but probably more pertinent is the fact that Ferrari is talking about the Speciale being more fun – and intense – to drive.

The horsepower uplift is largely inconsequential for a turbocharged hybrid, 37bhp soothed from the engine via different boost strategies for the turbos – inspired by the 296 Challenge car's mapping – and a whole host of forged pistons and titanium crankshafts. The electric motor sandwiched between the 3.0 V6 and the 8spd gearbox is now rated at 180bhp, giving that 880bhp total, a modest 50bhp more than the GTB, but that's a motor that now provides a little torque boost to the box for faster and more 'emotional' shifts.

As far as the weight loss, it's not entirely baked in. Carbon bumpers, engine cover and wheels (lightweight forged wheels are standard) are options, but liberal use of titanium for the engine internals, head studs, all fastenings, the springs (on Multimatic shocks), exhaust and various other bits saves quite a bit, plus the engine block and crankcase have been shaved to remove excess metal. Even the turbo is lighter. But as with any Ferrari, it'll cost a little more to save all the weight possible to get the car to the 1,410kg dry weight (1,460 for the Spider).

The good news is this isn't a limited run car. Though there's a limited time for production (which limits numbers) and you have to be what's called an 'active customer' for Ferrari. And be far enough up the waiting list. So if you have £348k for the Coupe or £395k for the Spider, you're in luck (prices vary according to local tax). Still, if the 296 Speciale drives like previous special editions, turning this one up to 11 might need a whole new dial.





HIT or MISS

Two titans of the editorial team fight it out

VIJAY PATTNI

TG'S WEBSITE EDITOR THINKS THE SPECIALE WILL BE EXACTLY THAT

Piero Ferrari – son of Enzo – once spoke about being mindful of the responsibility that comes with the family name. Which means this new 296 carries the whole weight of Maranello on its shoulders. ***Speciale****. Just sounds... proper.*

Should sound proper too, because the turbocharged V6 – nicknamed 'piccolo V12' – is now even more powerful. Not that anyone ever asked for more power from the 296, but it's got a big name to fill – 880bhp should do it. As should the lightweighting. If it's anything like that glorious 458, this should be molto Speciale indeed.

> **"The turbo V6 is now even more powerful"**

JACK RIX

TG'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JUST ISN'T FEELING THE LIGHTWEIGHTED LOVE

A few months back I heard a rumour. I shan't disclose which little birdie told me, but the news was off the scale exciting. The forthcoming lighter, faster, more speciale 296 would ditch the hybrid system and rely solely on its twin turbo V6 to bring genuine, unfiltered supercar thrills to the fore. It would have less power than the standard model, but be lighter and so quicker and nimbler – I was beside myself with admiration for Ferrari for taking such a drastic approach to weight loss. Sadly, my birdie is a baddie and the formula is crushingly familiar. It will be sensational to drive, I have no doubt, but I'll always be pining for the entirely made up 296 extra speciale that never was.

> **"I was beside myself with admiration for Ferrari"**

Qualify mode manages the boost from the e-motor when exiting corners to cut lap times. Our kind of hybrid

THE GOOD

Fresh out of the Hot Wheels design lab

Jun Cartier

Looks like the Valkyrie

Jerrod Black

Build it

Paul Vaccarello

A million times more refined design than the latest hack-job

Niklas Wejedal

DAMN THAT THING IS DROP DEAD GORGEOUS!

Steve Love

THE BAD

Having a centre pillar on a supercar windshield doesn't really seem like a good idea to me

Victor Dahl

Another EV that looks like it was designed by a five-year-old

Jerome

PROBABLY STILL CAN'T TAKE A CORNER

Kev Brown

It's already stuck in a pothole

Chance Bradshaw

Emotionless car, I'd rather see the 1960s Stingray

Remy Hoogland

THE UGLY

They can stick that where the sun don't shine

Andy Walker-hebborn

S**tbox...

Ramiro Garcia Carpio

PUT A PROPER ENGINE IN, EV SUCKS

Alan Wright

Another fridge on wheels?

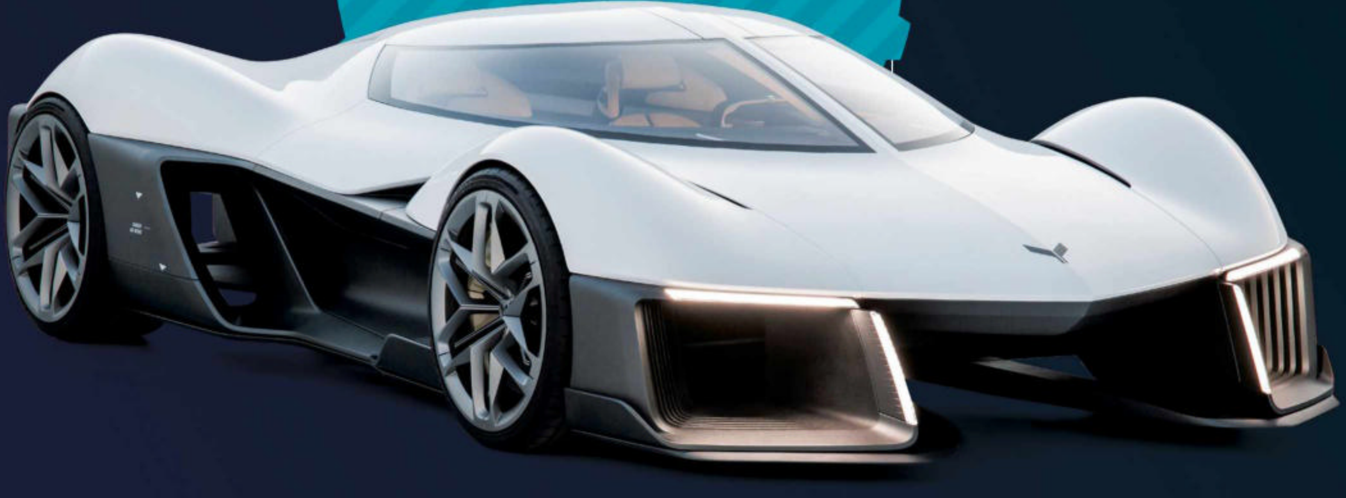
Adrian Lister

THIS IS NOT A CORVETTE

SA Jayasuriya

COMMENTS

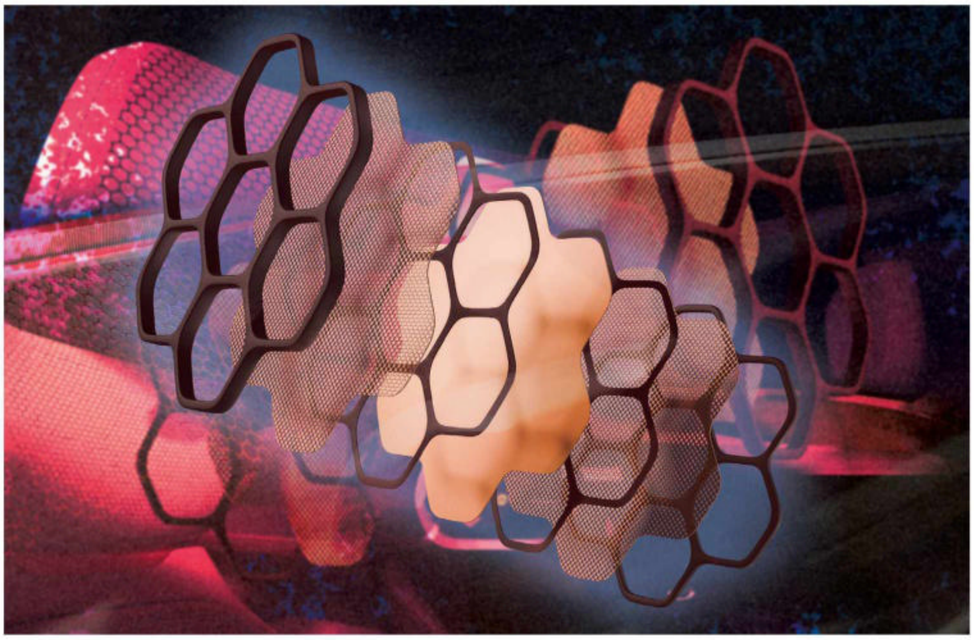
CORVETTE CONCEPT



ARE WE LOOKING AT THE NEXT GENERATION C9 CORVETTE? Yes! And also no! This new concept car will definitely influence the styling of the next gen Corvette, but it's not quite as simple as sticking on some numberplates and giving it the thumbs up.

It's the work of GM's new Advanced Design Studio in Leamington Spa and one of three Corvette concepts that will be shown this year. The second will come from GM's Los Angeles based studio, and finally – probably around August – we will see a concept made at the Detroit studio that uses elements from both... and is a proper preview of the C9.

And let's just get this out of the way early: yes this is imagined as a fully electric Corvette. But despite all that, the team has stuck with a classic set of mid-engined proportions. The car is split into two distinct halves – the pure top surface and functional lower section... but also with the central spine that cleaves the front and rear screens, a nod to the split window Stingray. **JACK RIX**



NEXT BIG THING

ELECTROSTATIC SPEAKERS

WORDS: PAUL HORRELL

CAR HI-FI SPEAKERS ARE HEAVY, bulky and wasteful of power. Packaging the speakers in the doors or dash is a headache. So is getting rid of the heat they generate.

Now imagine a speaker that isn't a cone, but a simple ultralight thin film. Instead of that heavy cone with its attached magnet vibrating back and forth, the whole film vibrates under electrostatic force that changes at the frequency of the music.

Electrostatic speakers have been a cult among hi-fi boffins for decades, because of their natural uncoloured sound. But they are new in cars.

High end ESL headphone maker Warwick Acoustics has been at the R&D phase for car systems for years, and says it will be offered in a production car this year.

One of the breakthroughs is shrinking the panels. Increasing the electrostatic charge and containing it between the stator plates that sit at a 1mm gap either side of the vibrating membrane. Material science has enabled this. That means the sound level rises hugely per area of panel.

Large flat panels would normally be just as hard to fit into car trim as deep cones. But new smaller panels are thin enough to lie behind curved door and dash panels, or the roofliner, or even in head restraints. The possibilities for packaging and stereo imaging are hugely exciting.

They're good for efficiency too. A big conventional audio system can draw nearly 1kW. Imagine a big battery EV averaging 40mph and 3mpkWh – not untypical – then the audio has wasted about 20 miles of potential range. It's worse in summer because the waste energy is heat radiated from the speakers, so you might have to run the aircon harder. The ESL uses less than one fifth of that energy.

There's also a significant manufacturing imprint. Conventional magnetic speakers contain a lot of environmentally damaging rare earth metals including neodymium and dysprosium. Even in an electric car with rare earth magnets in its motors, the hi-fi can account for 30 per cent of all the rare earths in the car.

While home ESLs have always been crushingly expensive, Warwick Acoustics says the new installations will be priced on par with say the high end optional car systems such as Burmester.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE...

FISKER KARMA

What is it?

Pre-Tesla Model S, this was the cool, suave green car for the Californian elites. Drawn by Henrik Fisker, the Karma was a long, low range extender four door stuffed with recycled fibres and good for Golf GTI performance with Prius shaming fuel economy.

Did they actually build any?

A total of 2,450 Karmas were actually manufactured, making it one of the most tangible vapourware cars of the millennium. But it was beset by production delays, and then when 300 were flooded while waiting to be shipped during Hurricane Sandy and 16 caught fire, the backers pulled out and Fisker shut up shop.

Where are they now?

Henrik's had another car company go bust since. The Karma was reborn as the 'Revero', while ex-GM boss Bob Lutz thought he could make a business out of selling them with a V8 under the hood. The result was the VL Automotive Destino. Heard of it? Exactly.

JAEGER-LECOULTRE
SWISS MADE

WATCHES

Protection racket

Keeping your prized possessions safe is common sense, hence these toughened up timepieces

WORDS: RICHARD HOLT

BULL BARS ON CARS STARTED getting popular in the 1950s. At first they were a practical way to keep wildlife from embedding itself in your grille, but because some people thought they looked cool, they became fashionable. Incredibly, protective steel bars on watches came along a lot earlier than the automotive versions.

Before the dawn of the 20th century, the watch was a delicate item carried in the breast pocket. Then with the outbreak of World War Two, the watch became a vital piece of battle kit and needed to get tough quickly. Most early war watches were pocket watches that were adapted by adding wrist straps and rudimentary protective bars across the face.

As watch companies started making watches specifically for the wrist, they began to think of ever more ingenious ways to keep them safe, and war was not the only motivator. In 1931, Jaeger-LeCoultre made the Reverso, a watch where the whole case flips over to keep the dial side protected during particularly vigorous games of polo. The watch continues to be a big seller today.

Improvement in material technology over the past century means that watches are no longer the fragile flowers they once were. It is hard these days to find a watch without a decent level of water resistance. And most decent ones have scratch resistant sapphire crystals that can take a knock.

PRO TIP

In the unlikely event you choose a watch not fitted with bull bars, it is important to consider the quality of your glass. Scratch resistant sapphire crystal is really the only choice to go for and most decent watchmakers know it is well worth the extra cost. Various types of reinforced glass are second best, but avoid acrylic as it is only marginally more scratch resistant than a decent bar of soap.

BLOW THE BUDGET

Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso
This slender watch might not look that tough, but the flipover case was an ingenious early attempt at wristwatch protection. Knocking on a century later, the Reverso has spawned a thousand different versions. It has a manual winding movement and blue calf leather strap. **£9,650; jaeger-lecoultre.com**

HAMILTON
AUTOMATIC

UNDER £1,500

Hamilton X Death Stranding 2
Hamilton is movie mad, putting watches in films from *Men in Black* to *Interstellar*. This bull bar sporting number was actually created for a video game – the sequel to the all-action *Death Stranding* – and has a titanium case. **£1,380; hamiltonwatch.com**

CERTINA
1888
DS CASCADEUR

UNDER £500

Certina Cascadeur
Certina made a bull bar watch back in the 1990s, and this limited edition pays tribute to it. With a quartz movement, rubber strap and 41.5mm stainless steel case, water resistant to 200m. Just 1,995 watches will be sold. **£440; certina.co.uk**

G-SHOCK
ADJUST
LIGHT
MODE
START
PROTECTION

UNDER £100

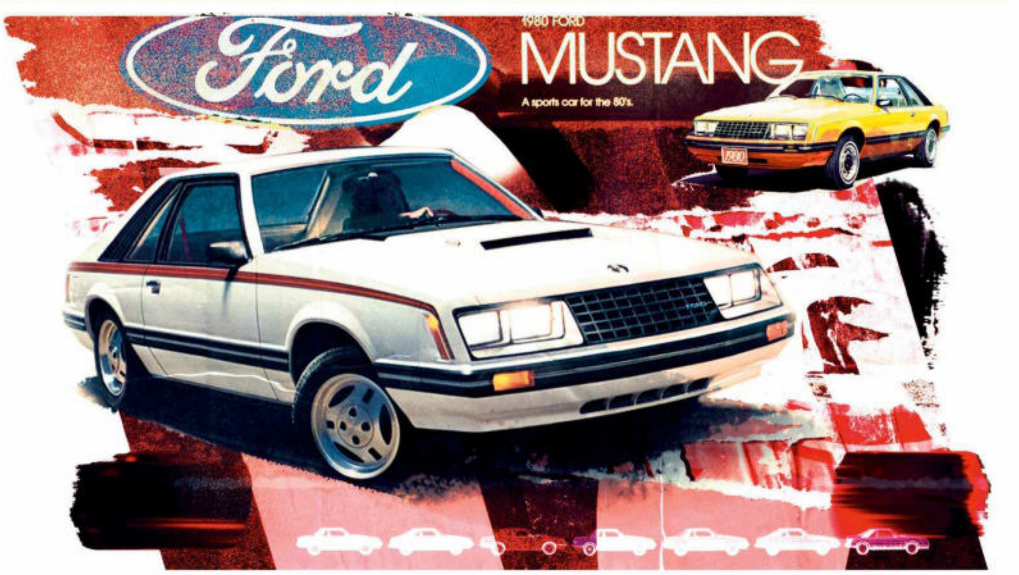
Casio G-Shock
G-Shocks don't need extra protection – they're designed to be dropped, stomped and submerged without complaint. But some figure that there's no such thing as too tough. With durable resin case, water resistant to 200m. **From £99.90; g-shock.co.uk**

EPIC FAIL

The finest failures in automotive history

1980 FORD MUSTANG V8

WORDS: SAM PHILIP



Many wise, knowledgeable car enthusiasts will sagely inform you the third gen 'fox body' Mustang is anything but a fail. They will inform you that, in the near half century since its launch, it has proven itself an ultimate tuner car: cheap to buy, easy to work on, straightforward to boost to big horsepower. The fox body Mustang, they will tell you, is a legend.

Epic Fail is here to tell you that these people are wrong. Yes, the Gen 3 Mustang has indeed proven itself a fine platform for modification, but that's just proof of how badly Ford ballsed it up first time round. No one's ever felt the need to modify the Mona Lisa.

OK, some third gen Mustangs weren't entirely awful. But some really were. Case in point is 1980's 4.2-litre V8 model. This hydrocarbon gargling, fire breathing beast churned out – ready for this? – a grand total of 118bhp. That's a specific output of 29bhp per litre. If your 1.0-litre Ford Fiesta made such pitiful power density, it… well, it wouldn't actually move.

There were, in Ford's defence, some mitigating circumstances behind the V8's flaccid firepower. In the wake of the 1979 oil crisis, the Blue Oval tried to figure out a way to squeeze some extra economy from its hoggish 5.0-litre V8, and came up with the not especially ingenious solution of simply sleeving it down, and hoping that'd do. It didn't. If the 4.2 did save its owners on fuel bills, that was simply because they couldn't be bothered to drive it.

The other issue afflicting the third gen Mustang was its deeply gawky design, which with modern eyes appear to be the work of either a) primitive AI or b) whatever they used to build Erling Haaland. Ford boasted it had set three separate design teams in competition to come up with its design, thus offering proof that too many cooks really do spoil the muscle car broth. At least it gave all those future tuners plenty to improve upon.

> **"If the 4.2 did save its owners on fuel bills, that was because they couldn't be bothered to drive it"**

THRILLS WITHOUT THE BILLS

Fast(ish) cars you can actually afford

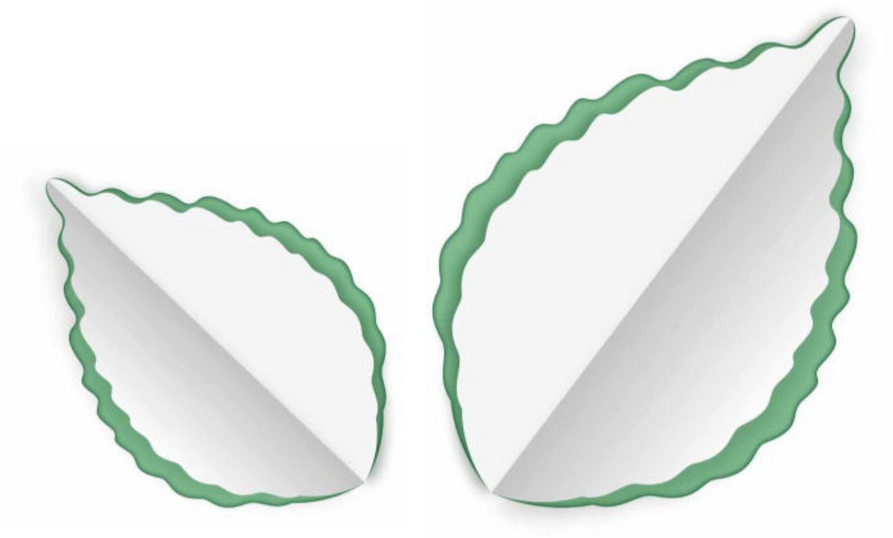
AUDI A2 1.4

What is it?
OK, so the Every1 previews a small, efficient German EV, but the A2 was ahead of the game in all ways when it came to German efficiency 25 years ago.

Why are we interested?
Because the 1.4 petrol A2 was an aluminium genius that is ULEZ compliant (not the diesel), and it was well packaged and efficient.

So… it's the same but not?
We've lost sight of the basics; A2s came in at under a tonne, could hit 98mpg, and looked cool. And that's in 2000.

Which one should I buy?
Late 1.4s hit ULEZ compliance, and are available between £800–£4k. Not fast, but more interesting than most.



PAPER LOVES TREES

European forests, which provide wood for making paper, paper packaging and many other products, have been growing by 1,500 football pitches every day!

Source: Two Sides Analysis of FAO data, 2005-2020
European Forests: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK

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FINAL INSPECTION BY
AHMED MUNIR

100% GENUINE QUESTIONS

HELP!

The internet's most searched questions, rudely answered by us

THIS MONTH: **BRITISH CARS**

1. Does Britain still make cars?

Does the Pope still pray? Is *The Traitors* still entirely nonsensical when you really stop to think about it? Of course! Though the UK automotive industry has declined somewhat in recent years, our proud shores still produce many unique and idiosyncratic cars, including the Beauchamp Trunnion, Nether-Frotting Type G, Digby Wimble Sport and Riversimple Rasa. OK we made the last one up.

2. Why do British cars have the steering wheel on the right?

Because it's tricky to drive a car with no steering wheel.

3. Are British cars limited to 155mph?

How very dare you? You're thinking of spineless, timorous German cars, which have been limited to a piffling 250kph since a 'gentlemen's agreement' of the 1970s. British cars, on the other hand, aren't artificially constrained by some overzealous health and safety fat cats, and are free to run to their very limit. Which, in the case of a performance machine like the Vauxhall Combo Life Electric, can be as high as a searing 81mph.

IMAGE: MANUFACTURER, GETTY

4. Why do British cars lose so much money?

Forgetfulness and an overly trusting nature.

5. Do British cars have air conditioning?

Yes, but we've not had to use it since that freak heatwave of 1996, when temperatures in some parts of the country rose to a sizzling 19°C.

6. Why do British cars leak oil?

To create a fiendish slick on the road behind, upon which the car containing the gaggle of pursuing baddies shall skid, leave the road, plunge over a convenient cliff and burst inexplicably into flames. No, *you've* been watching too many old Bond films.

7. Why are British cars so small?

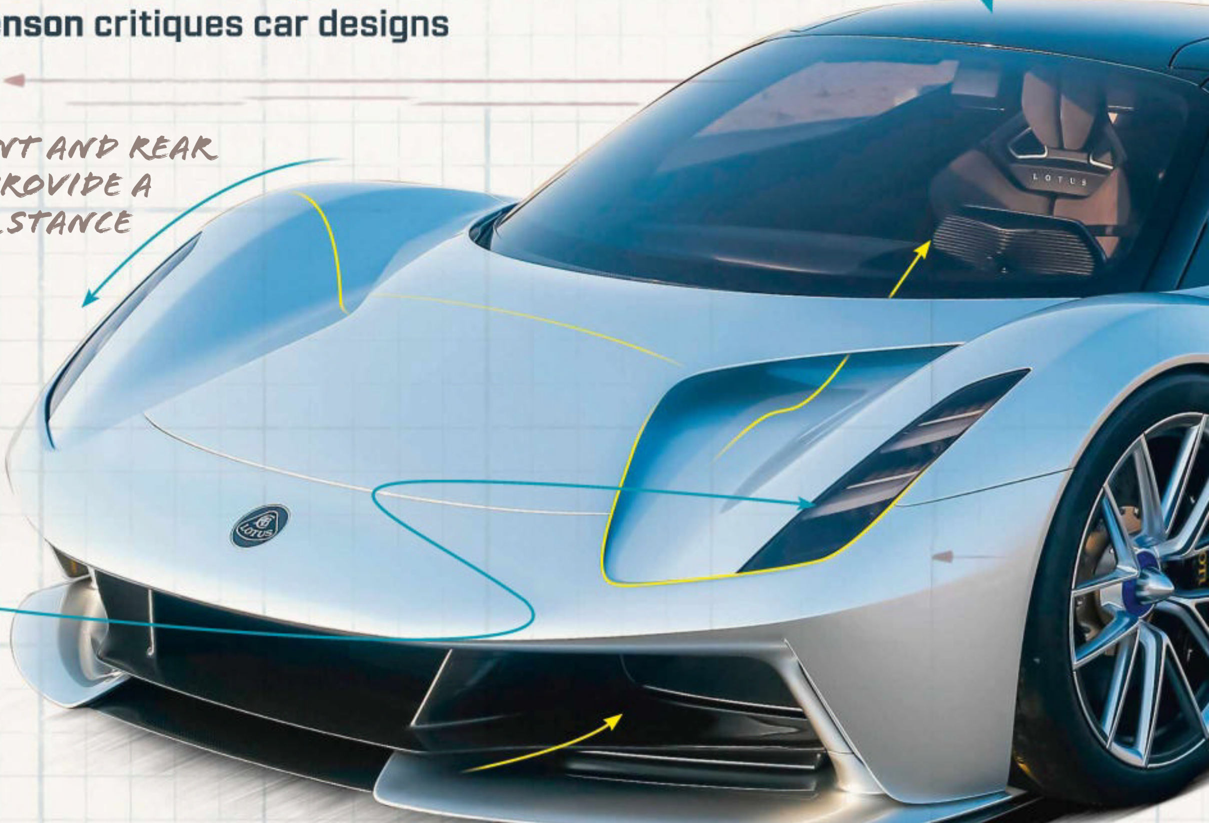
We're assuming this question is mostly asked by Americans? In which case, Americans, it's not that our cars are small, it's that you're a long way away from them. Come a bit closer. Closer. Scooch more... there you go. See? Totally normal size.

8. Can British cars drive in Europe?

They can, but frankly why would you bother? What's Europe got that Britain doesn't? Apart from pain au chocolat. And siestas. And proper mountains. And tiramisu. And autobahns. And... hang on, just checking last minute LeShuttle prices, give us a tick...

HOT OR NOT?

Frank Stephenson critiques car designs

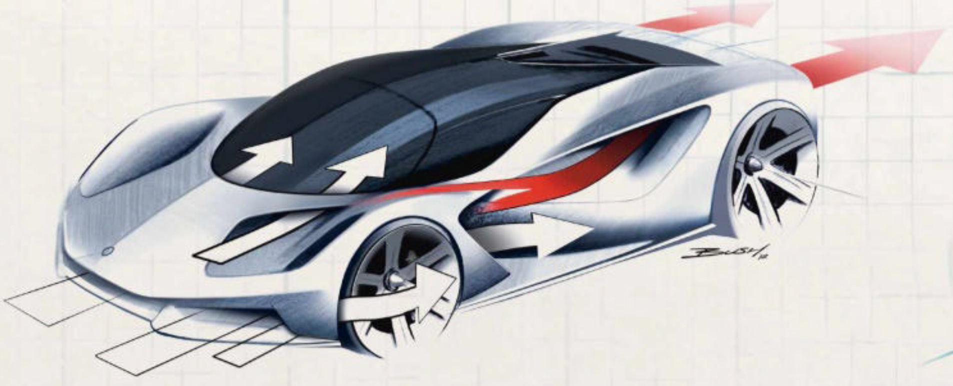


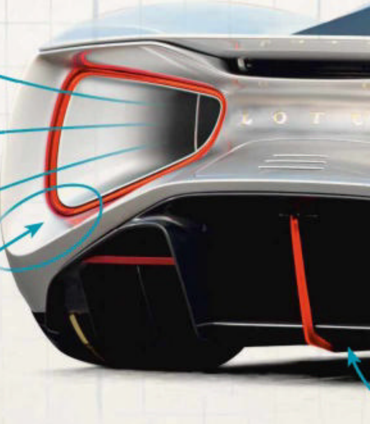
BLACKED OUT TEARDROP CABIN COCOONS THE OCCUPANTS

POWERFUL FRONT AND REAR HAUNCHES PROVIDE A MUSCULAR STANCE

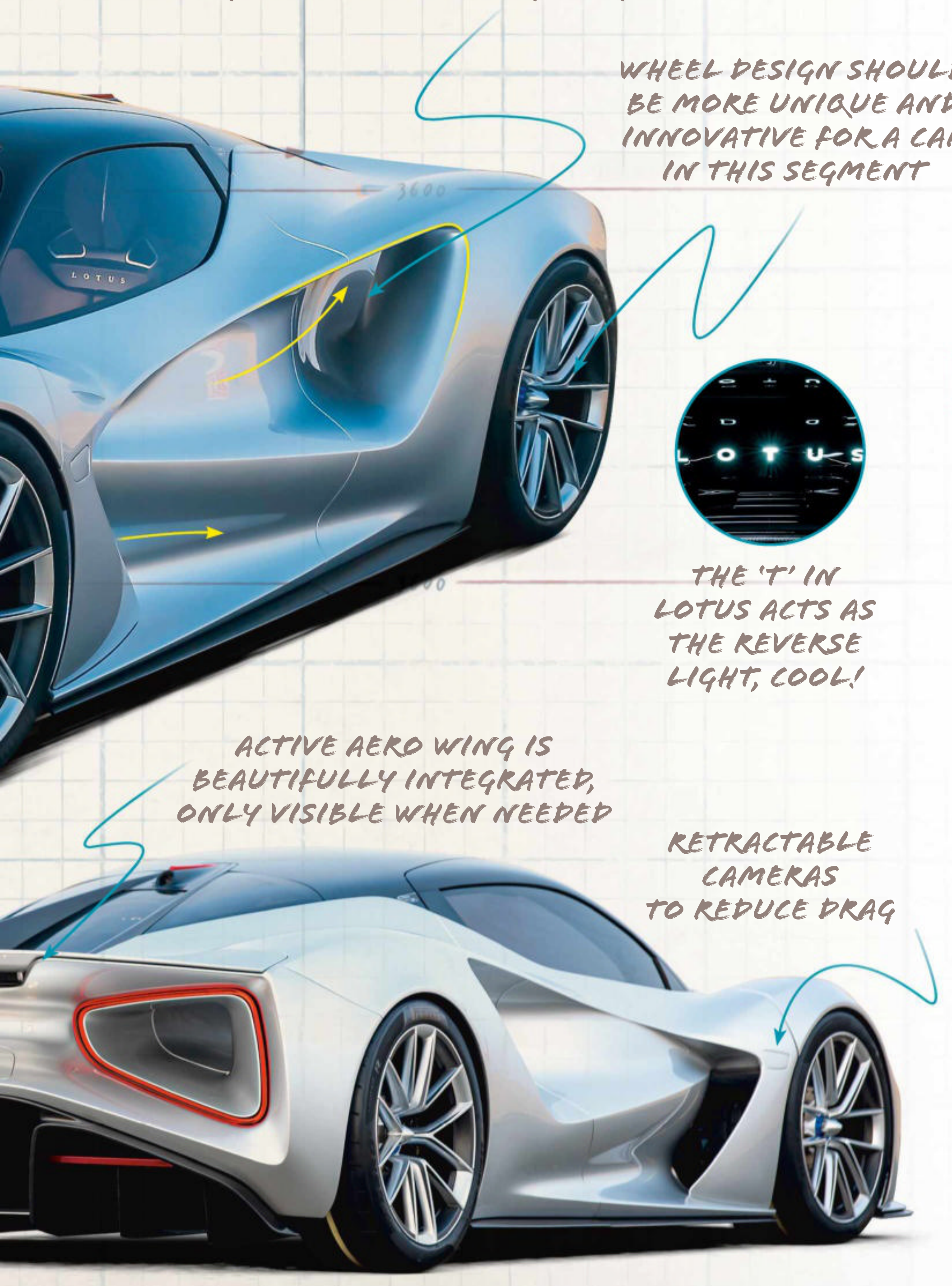
LASER TECH HIGH AND LOW BEAMS, WOW!

STRIKINGLY INNOVATIVE AND EFFICIENT DESIGN ALLOWS AIR TO FLOW OVER AND THROUGH THE BODY





VENTURI TUNNEL CREATES DRAMATIC REHEAT JET PIPE TAIL LIGHT GRAPHIC



DRAMATICALLY SCULPTED BODYSIDE OPENINGS ALLOW FOR MEGA AIR FLOW MANAGEMENT – GREAT FOR REDUCING DRAG!

WHEEL DESIGN SHOULD BE MORE UNIQUE AND INNOVATIVE FOR A CAR IN THIS SEGMENT

THE 'T' IN LOTUS ACTS AS THE REVERSE LIGHT, COOL!

ACTIVE AERO WING IS BEAUTIFULLY INTEGRATED, ONLY VISIBLE WHEN NEEDED

RETRACTABLE CAMERAS TO REDUCE DRAG

DIFFUSER HAS AN ACTIVE DRS FLAP

FANTASTIC PROPORTIONS BEAUTIFULLY SCULPTED

What's Frank up to?

Frank is busy leading the creative direction at Frank Stephenson Design, an award winning studio that he founded in 2018. The team is designing flying taxis (eVTOLs) and, launching next month, an eyewear range for Italian brand Arena. Watch this space!

Lotus Evija

THE EVIJA IS A BOLD STEP FOR LOTUS. A futuristic EV hypercar that pushes aero to the extreme. Without the soul of a combustion engine, designers and engineers have to find ways to give a car character and personality. With the Evija and its masterfully sculpted body surfaces and dramatic Venturi tunnels that carve through the rear bumpers, it is clear Lotus is aiming to create a vehicle that is not only visually striking, but highly efficient.

Despite the minimalist front end appearance, there are a few clever passive aerodynamic features on display that channel air over the windshield as well as out behind the front wheels, creating downforce while also cooling. You can follow the airflow around the side of the vehicle into the cavernous side intakes, and finally out of the huge rear openings – brilliantly integrated into the highly distinctive tail light signature.

It was never going to be an easy task for a battery powered hypercar to embody Chapman's iconic mantra of "Simplify, then add lightness", but there is no doubt the Evija is a wonderfully innovative, efficient piece of cutting edge design.

VERDICT: HOT

PLAY

MIKE'S CHANNEL

Q: CAN YOU HAVE TOO MANY SIM WHEELS?

My name is Mike and I'm an addict. The things I'm addicted to are usually round in shape and produce a feeling of euphoria, but they're not drugs. Tragically, I'm talking about sim racing steering wheels.

It's not really my fault. Back in the early days of sim racing equipment, the wheel rim remained resolutely attached to the base and was usually generic in design. Then in 1999 a company by the name of Thrustmaster, which I'll confess sounds like the alias of an adult movie performer, released a licensed Ferrari 360 Modena steering wheel. Proper automotive manufacturers had got involved in sim equipment and all bets were off.

These days, the rim and the wheel base are separate, hot swappable via motorsport grade quick release systems, and the effect on my bank balance has been, frankly, catastrophic. Depending on the type of pretend racing car I happen to be driving at any given time, I'll have a variety of rims to suit the job, whether that's a wide circumference circular wheel for rallying or a miniscule batarang festooned with buttons for formula cars. I have a McLaren wheel for driving McLarens and a Porsche wheel for driving Porsches. The other thing I have, clearly, is a problem.

It's only getting worse as products become more complex, authentic and ultimately more desirable. Fanatec made arguably the biggest step five years ago with its Podium Steering Wheel BMW M4 GT3. That name is burying the lede slightly, the important part is 'BMW M4 GT3' because it is the exact same wheel, and therefore directly compatible, with the one found in an actual BMW M4 GT3 racecar. As a gamer, getting one feels like buying the first issue of one of those overpriced build it yourself magazine subscriptions.

More recently, Fanatec has pulled a similar trick with its Podium Steering Wheel Bentley GT3, this time adding a circular, self-centring display in the middle of the wheel and including rotaries that are 'knurled', a word I'm convinced was invented solely to sound expensive. The only thing missing is a hand stitched, diamond quilted Bentley branded bib to catch the drool every time I look at it.

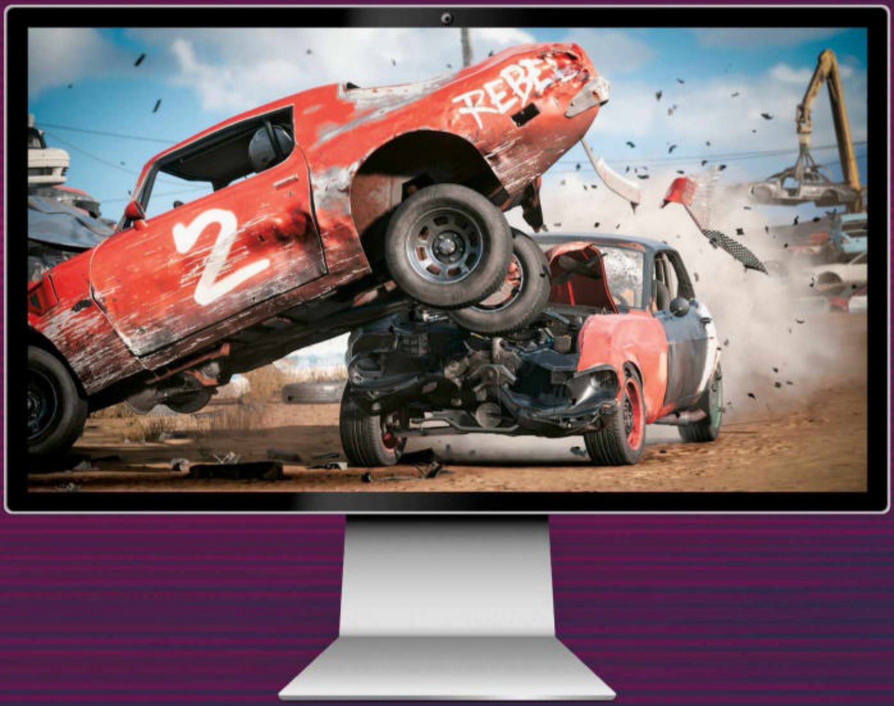
These more authentic wheel rims are only multiplying, with a small cottage industry springing up. Relative newcomer VPG Sim has secured the licence to produce a replica of the new Ford Mustang GT3 steering wheel, constructed from the same materials and moulds as the real thing. Is it excessive for me to have a different rim for every different GT3 car on the grid? It feels excessive.

I think the biggest test of my resolve, though, comes in the shape of the £8,000 Cosworth CCW Mk2 Pro Sim Wheel, which is built by Cosworth itself and is an exact replica of a wheel I've spent years staring at in the cockpit of various Indycars and sports cars in iRacing. Look, I swear I could quit any time I want but, just out of interest, what's the going rate for a human kidney on the black market?

Mike Channell is a TG writer, multimillion subscriber YouTuber and occasional racing driver. Not evidence of a strong work ethic, just an attention span obliterated by too many video games

ILLUSTRATION: WALTER NEWTON

GAME OF THE MONTH



WRECKFEST 2

£20, PC

Another month, another 'early access' game. This time it's the sequel to the obscenely entertaining *Wreckfest*, which, as the title suggests, was not about putting together a clean lap's worth of perfectly clipped apexes. *Wreckfest 2* is relatively slight in its early access guise, only a handful of tracks and cars, but the hilarious core ingredients are present and correct. The signature wallowy off road handling is just as bewitching as it always was and the level of graphical detail is astonishing, with tracks strewn with destructible objects and every car featuring an authentic rusty patina. This is the prettiest ugly game you'll ever see.

There's not much here at the moment, but *Wreckfest 2* currently only costs 20 notes and that's about as much as it costs to heat your house for 48 hours these days. So stick a jumper on, turn down the thermostat and let the laughter keep you warm. **MC**

GEAR

MONTBLANC GREAT CHARACTERS ENZO FERRARI FOUNTAIN PEN

montblanc.com; £1,030

Montblanc's Great Characters collection features fancy pens that pay tribute to people such as Muhammad Ali, JFK, Elvis and one Enzo Ferrari. The Giallo Modena fountain pen features the dates of Enzo's birth and his first racing victory engraved on the cone. Perfect for signing for that new 296 you've ordered.

McLAREN F1 X LOOP SWITCH 2

loopearplugs.com; £59.95

Perfect your F1 pit crew look with these new McLaren F1 branded Loop Switch 2 earplugs, finished in black and papaya orange. Click between three modes to choose the level of noise cancellation required – whether that's muffling out the man talking loudly into his phone on the bus or drowning out the kids on a long car journey, they work great.

WALERO 2.0 MOTORSPORT BASELAYER

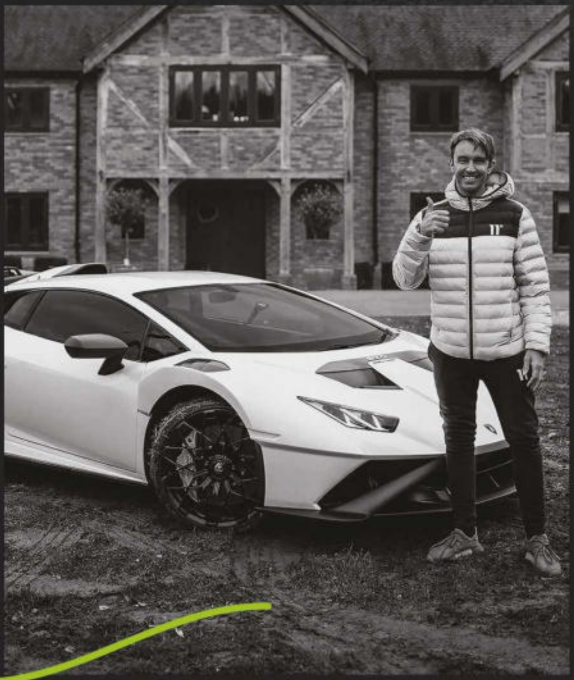
walero.uk; £160 ex VAT

Maker of motorsport racewear Walero's new 2.0 range is both fire retardant and temperature regulating thanks to some NASA developed 'Outlast' tech that absorbs, stores, and releases heat as needed. And it's fully compliant with FIA regs. Whip one out at your next track day and you'll be the talk of the pitlane.

SANTA POD RACEWAY INTRODUCES

REVVD UP

14TH JUNE 2025



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MARK MCCANN & LBWK

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JETHRO
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There's hope yet for a fun motoring future, says Jethro

As I write this, the sun is shining and the temperature has picked up. It's finally spring and my optimism is rising. It helps that there seems to be good news every single day at the moment. (Not in the wider world, which is a disaster, but in our little automotive enclave.) After several years of oppressive doom and gloom for car enthusiasts it appears that the oft touted winter of our passion has been rolled back, the heavy frost is thawing and maybe, just maybe it's spring for us, too.

Do I feel bad that EV sales are failing to ignite as anticipated, causing manufacturers all sorts of problems? I do not. Am I happy to see the likes of Porsche reinvesting in ICE technology and trying to adapt new EV only architecture to accept engines? Oh yes. Does the news that Mercedes is developing a new V8 engine and will stick it back in the C63 model ASAP fill me with glee? I'm afraid it does.

Perhaps I should feel a tinge of guilt. We are all meant to want to save the world. But instead I find myself heartened by the power of the people. For years publicly pious and mostly disingenuous politicians have made decisions on our behalf that sound great on the election campaign trail but have no grounding in reality. For once, a large majority of people in all markets have just said, "Well, we can make our own decisions." To put it politely.

> "This is not to say that I hate EVs. But boy, have they been shoved down our throats"

This is not to say that I hate EVs. But boy, have they been shoved down our throats. Usually new technology takes over once it's better, cheaper and more convenient than the incumbent. Right now it's none of those things in all but a very few use cases. As many have said before, legislate the end goal and let the engineers do the rest. Legislating the path to said target from a position of limited knowledge and experience is a fool's errand.

All that being said, my hopes for the future of fun motoring is even being bolstered in the EV segment, too. I couldn't care much for yet another 1,000bhp saloon or 2,000bhp supercar that weighs more than the moon and has an appeal half-life measured in seconds, but projects like the new Renault 5 Turbo 3E are genuinely intriguing. It references old heroes but isn't slavishly stuck in the past and the look, feel and promise of the technology within is lip smacking.

There's a film on *TG*'s YouTube channel about the 3E but just think reimagined Group B look, RWD and 540bhp from two in-wheel motors that offer precise torque vectoring, plus a hydraulic handbrake. And just 1,450kg! It's an extreme concept and, sadly, a huge chunk of change at over £120,000, but at least it's provocative and recognises that a conventional sports car or supercar with a sonorous engine replaced by electric motors just won't cut it. For an EV to be truly fun requires a wholly different approach.

The real challenge is to bring this sort of thinking into the grasp of normal people who can't blow well over £100,000 on a car with a very narrow capability window. Luckily, while manufacturers work out the solution to that conundrum, we've all been granted a reprieve. The road ahead is long, exciting and paved, for the foreseeable future, with V8 engines.

Host of TopGear America, Jethro has driven most things, mostly sideways, and forged a reputation as one of the world's most fearless road testers. Only one thing terrifies him – electric cars

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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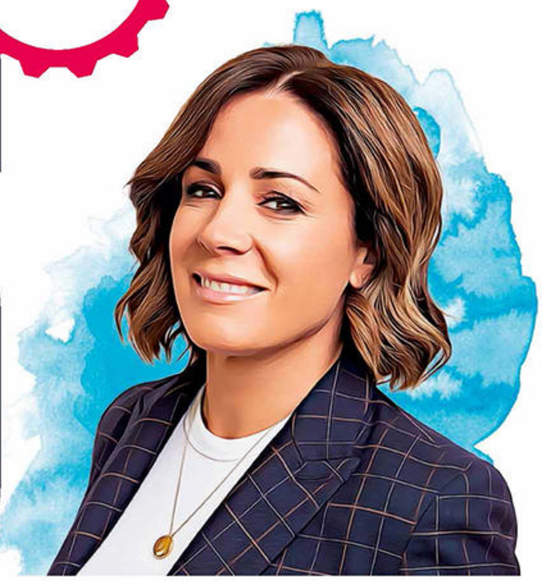
Specsavers

PINKS

NATALIE PINKHAM



Eddie Jordan's death is a sad moment for F1, says Natalie

In the ever evolving world of F1 – now a global juggernaut of speed and spotless PR – the loss of Eddie Jordan feels seismic. Not because he was still on the pitwall or publicly pulling strings in the paddock (although he was still absolutely doing that under the radar – note the Adrian Newey to Aston deal), but because voices like his are vanishing. Loud, honest, unpolished and unmistakably human, Eddie was the sport's living antidote to the hypermanaged, sponsor sanitised travelling circus.

Eddie Jordan wasn't just a team boss. He was a true character and the best raconteur I have ever met. The kind of man who could spot talent a mile off – Michael Schumacher, anyone? – and still crack a joke with mechanics five minutes later. He ran his team like a rock band on tour: charismatic, chaotic and bursting with heart. His DNA permeated the ranks of the team, and does to this day in its current iteration – Aston Martin – where a handful of his loyal employees are still on its payroll.

> "Eddie Jordan ran his team like a rock band on tour: charismatic, chaotic and bursting with heart"

F1 is on a golden run, new fans pour in by the millions, but the flip side of that is big tech, big money and bigger image control have swept through like a desert sandstorm, polishing every surface. We are at risk of not telling the whole truth, for fear of upsetting the corporate bosses and social media mobs. Eddie never hesitated. He said what he thought, not what he thought would trend well. He also had a strong sense of right and wrong. He once found out that a team boss had been rude to me, mistakenly thinking I had been the source of erroneous information about his team. Eddie steamed straight in there and demanded an immediate apology.

Eddie could also be brash, unpredictable and occasionally wrong, but that's what made him real, and why we loved him. He reminded us that F1 isn't just about data and tyre deg, it is about people, egos, passion, risk, triumph and failure. He was perhaps at his most authentic when at home with his wife Marie, children and grandchildren. Just this past Christmas he sent out a video Christmas card with them all singing, dancing and playing musical instruments – it was gorgeous. Notably Eddie was right at the back, letting his kids and grandkids take turns centre stage.

As our sport soars to new exciting heights, let's not forget that characters like Eddie are irreplaceable. F1 will go on becoming glossier, grander and more compelling, but it will be just a little less mad and maverick without him. There will never be another Eddie Jordan – which is a huge loss when the sport needs characters like him more than ever.

Natalie Pinkham is first and foremost a motorsport nut, but also a presenter for Sky Sports F1. Nobody knows more about the sport, or has better behind the scenes access to the paddock and drivers

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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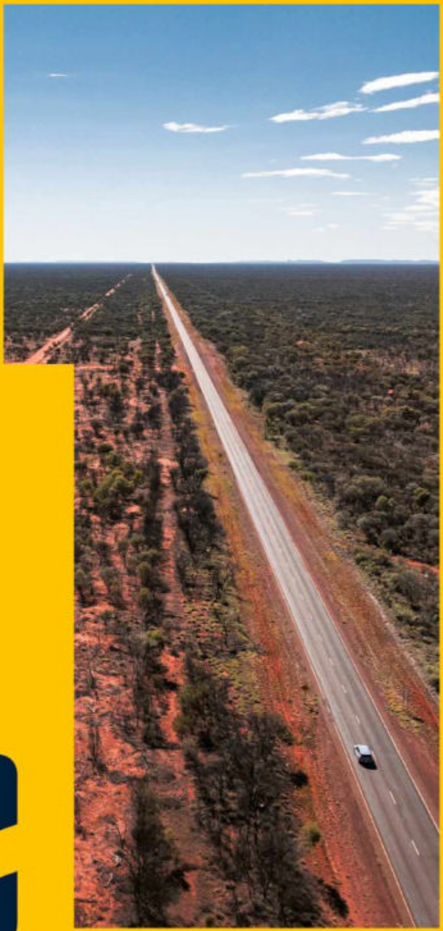
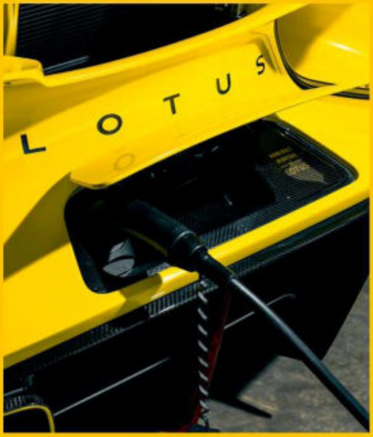
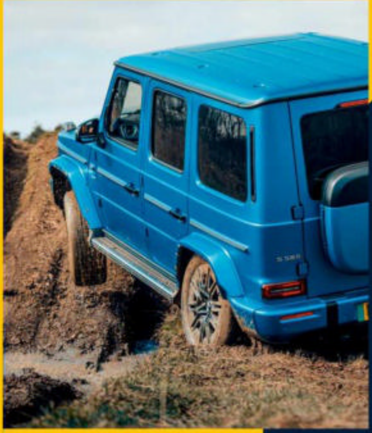


THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025





POWER

juice
booster

BBC TG THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

TRIP

The 2,011bhp Lotus Evija has the potential to change everything… Jethro is first to brace his neck and cut loose on track

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON
PHOTOGRAPHY JONNY FLEETWOOD

A beautiful day in Wales and a Lotus. What could be simpler? Perfect tarmac, jaw dropping scenery and a pure, lightweight, throwback sports car. Apply a few cliches about adding lightness, the genius of Colin Chapman and a liberal sprinkling of 'ride handling balance' fairy dust and you have the formula that's been on the rinse and repeat cycle in car magazines since the 1960s. Did I mention steering feel yet?

Don't worry. It's coming. But first, let's throw out everything we know of how this tale goes. Today is truly a new day. The Lotus in question isn't a sports car. The Evija is truly hyper. Fiendishly complex, hysterically powerful, mind meltingly expensive and (sadly for Lotus), likely to be as exclusive as ground unicorn horn.

The price of £2m plus taxes is a rather fundamental limiting factor, of course, but that's nothing compared to the bleak market conditions. In 2019, when the Evija was first revealed, the world was hurtling towards EV domination and the unprecedented performance potential created dazzling new possibilities.

In 2025 things aren't so optimistic. In fact, while the mainstream is quickly retreating to hybrid, the hypercar customer has resoundingly opted out of the great electric revolution. Just ask Pininfarina or Rimac. So, right now and despite a Herculean effort by Lotus to bring the Evija to fruition, the "maximum of 130 cars" promise seems as overinflated as its total power output.

Yet even if the Evija's stated sales target is DOA, it remains a fascinating car and seeing two parked side by side in a pit garage at Anglesey – the roadtrip comes later – is a very special moment. These are the most powerful production cars *TopGear* has ever tested so the clear skies are a godsend, and later the unbroken sunshine will beautifully render every detail, duct and aero device. Why two? Well, with a 93kWh battery feeding four electric motors the range is, um, compromised. Lotus claims 195 miles but on a racetrack you can cut that in half, then maybe in half again. So having a spare seems prudent. Sensible, even.

Speaking of sensible, the Evija has a total power output of 2,011bhp. Remember the Lotus Carlton, the super saloon that prompted questions in parliament due to its irresponsible power output? Well, each one

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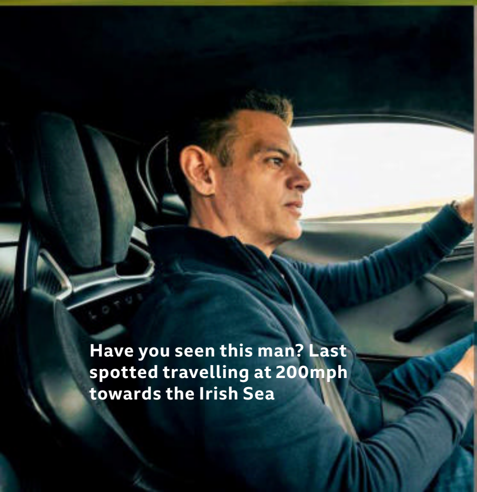

Have you seen this man? Last spotted travelling at 200mph towards the Irish Sea

of the Lotus Evija's wheels has 125bhp more than the Carlton's total output. It can accelerate from 0–186mph in under nine seconds and hits 217mph. Zero to 60mph? Lotus simply says "less than three seconds", but even one exploratory launch on Anglesey's straight delivers an easy GPS verified two seconds. The performance is otherworldly and a huge departure from the usual Lotus ways.

Yet, rolling out of the pitlane there's a very real feeling of two worlds colliding here. The full carbon fibre structure is extremely stiff, the interior wonderfully minimalist with lovely materials and the tiny yoke-like steering wheel feels delicious. These high end hypercar calling cards in combination with the manic whirr of the electric motors and instant, ear flattening performance suggest the Evija shouldn't have a shred of Lotusness about it. Yet it does.

Much of it bubbles up through the steering. Lotus elected to stick with hydraulic power steering to ensure clarity of feedback and it feels like an inspired decision. The Evija might have alien performance but initially the sensations it provides are reassuringly familiar. There's no heavy regen, either. God knows the battery could do with all the help it can get in terms of range, but I appreciate that lifting the throttle doesn't artificially induce heavy negative *g*. In fact, programming in a tiny bit of regen wouldn't be a bad idea as the Evija seems to freewheel when not under load.

Perhaps most satisfying is that the Evija feels light and lithe. As every Lotus should. With its exotic structure and a real focus on weightsaving, the Evija has been kept to 1,884kg. Heavy compared to, say, an Aston Martin Valkyrie, but literally hundreds of kilograms lighter than other EVs of this nature. With electronically adjustable Multimatic dampers and a heave damper to handle the huge downforce generated, body control is measured and, again, has an organic feel. As I gently increase the pace the Evija stays composed but breathes with the surface and has just enough movement on its suspension to impart information and breed ever more confidence.

The soundtrack increases in intensity, too. There's no fakery here. The motors almost shriek under full power and while the noise isn't spine tingling, the frenzied, runaway sense of it is perfectly in keeping with the performance, which borders on the surreal. Such is the assault on the senses that even the lack of a gearbox to control doesn't seem a mortal fault. The Evija might not quite conform to all my usual mental markers, but it's a deeply moving experience. A mix of high definition tactility and quantum performance.

Yet, there are compromises. The sheer scale of performance on offer has led Lotus to a necessarily slightly conservative balance. On track we're concentrating on Sport and Track modes (Valet, Range, City and Tour will be addressed later), but even

"MOST SATISFYING IS THAT THE EVIJA FEELS LITHE"

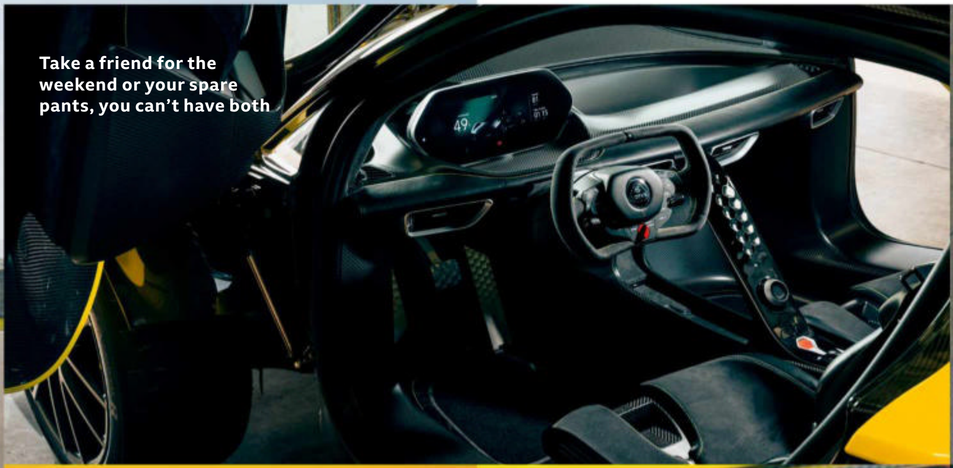
“THE MOTORS ALMOST SHRIEK UNDER FULL POWER”

fully wound up the Evija’s traction and stability control remains active at all times.

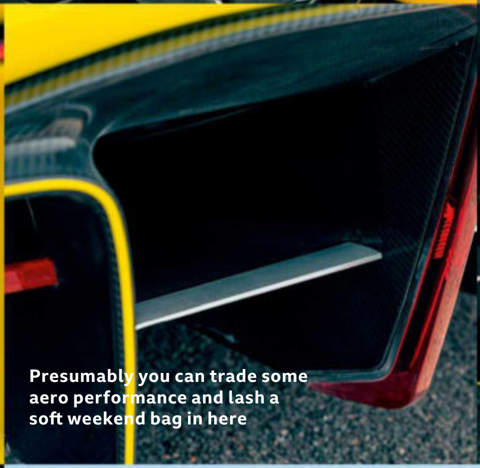
This measure seems wise when you see the telltale light on the dash flickering at 130mph in a straight line and feel the ever present torque steer as the Pirellis are stressed right to the limit. However, you’d think the watchful eye of the electronics might allow Lotus to really exploit the power of true torque vectoring. As each wheel can be controlled independently there’s a whole new world of possibility… but the Evija is neutral almost to a fault. In Sport mode there’s a hint of understeer first and sometimes a tiny sliver of oversteer under power on corner exit but it’s almost imperceptible. Switch to Track mode and the Evija’s stability is incredible but there’s almost nothing by way of adjustability. Point, shoot, hope your neck muscles can take the beating. Repeat. It’s outrageous but the thrill is physical rather than an experience that conquers your heart and mind.

It’s funny, the only time the Evija feels slightly unruly is under full power in a straight line – where the front tyres can feel very sensitive to surface changes and cambers – and under heavy braking. There’s just not quite the stability you expect and because Lotus didn’t go for a ‘skateboard’ construction (instead building up the batteries where you’d find a V8 or V12 in a mid-engined supercar) the weight just behind your shoulders moves and shakes in ways that can feel pretty unnerving. Oh, and even six piston carbon ceramic brakes can’t handle 2,011bhp and 1,884kg for too long before the pedal starts to creep closer to the floor.

You might have noticed that I’ve avoided describing the raw performance up until now. Mostly because, well, it’s hard to put into words. Relentless? Yep, but that doesn’t quite do it justice. Sickening? Weirdly not. Perhaps the driving position and excellent body control help here, but the Evija is far less vomit inducing than a Tesla Plaid, for example. Extreme? Absolutely. The Evija makes something like a McLaren 750S feel very ordinary indeed. Unforgettable? Perhaps that sums it up best. Not just the acceleration but the whole car. The Evija is brutal yet oddly balletic at times, wild yet determinedly controlled – a vast leap for Lotus but still clinging to the old ways where it can. It turns out there’s nothing simple about a sunny day in Wales and this Lotus. But I won’t forget it in a hurry. Now, about that roadtrip…



Take a friend for the weekend or your spare pants, you can't have both



Presumably you can trade some aero performance and lash a soft weekend bag in here

- SET +
CITY
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TRACK

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mph
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Not the same as peering in on an elegant, sculpted V12, but at least it looks expensive

TESTER'S NOTES

In the 1970s the Lotus test drivers used to 'pop' from the factory to the south of France for the weekend to put the latest car through its paces. We decided to do the same, albeit with a little more 'pop'

WORDS JASON BARLOW **PHOTOGRAPHY** OLGUN KORDAL

APPROVED

BEST EV HYPERCAR

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

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GALZIN
LES PAINS
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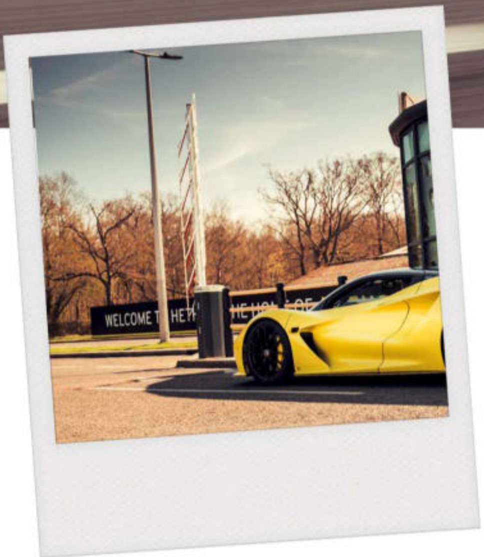

IS everything that’s ever been filmed now available on YouTube? Apparently so. Including a very much of its time behind the scenes documentary charting the development of the 1970s Lotus Elite and Eclat. Everything is browny beige and you can practically smell the cigarettes and political incorrectness. Chief engineer Tony Rudd is a laconic presence throughout, and resembles a potential third Ronnie (ask your parents). On a specific packaging issue, he notes that “one solution was to breed a special race of passengers, but we rejected that as taking too long”. Woke was a way off.

Rudd and fellow Lotus alumnus Mike Kimberley often thought nothing of taking a prototype on a long haul roadtrip. They’d leave the Hethel HQ, near Norwich, on Friday and head to the French Riviera or Rome, returning to their desks no later than Monday lunchtime. A real

“IT HAS ROUGHLY THE IMPACT OF A METEOR THAT’S CRASH LANDED INTO EARTH”

world sign-off, and the sort of automotive buccaneering that worked back when the gendarmerie had a more *laissez faire* attitude.

Which got us thinking. Why not channel some of that spirit for *TopGear*’s exclusive first road drive in the Lotus Evija? We’ve certainly waited long enough for the opportunity. The Evija broke cover in July 2019, so it rivals those other moonshot cars, the Aston Martin Valkyrie and Mercedes-AMG One, in terms of gestational challenge and hubris. It’s actually been in production for a while now, built to exacting standards in the same building in which the fabled Lotus Carlton came to life a generation ago.

Yes, it’s our EV Hypercar of the Year and we admire the fact that the Evija exists at all. But it’s also the *only* new electric hypercar of the past 12 months, and that surely tells its own story. With a power output of 2,011bhp (or 1.5 megawatts if you prefer), the Evija can claim to be the most powerful production car in history (well, until we get a go in the Koenigsegg Gemera, Rimac Nevera R or Hennessey F5 Venom Evolution) and it looks a million dollars. Trouble is, it costs roughly three times that, so the finished car arrives with some baggage. It also arrives with no space for any *actual* baggage, such are the extremes the design and engineering team have gone to. The perfect car for a 1,000 mile plus roadtrip, then, in true *TG* style.

And just look at it. Designed by a team led by the indefatigable Russell Carr, it has roughly the impact of a meteor that’s crash landed into Earth. Not bad for something the world’s had six years to get used to. We often invoke a car’s sculptural qualities when dissecting its design, but this one actually calls to mind Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth. High minded reference points for a machine whose form is uncommonly intelligent, as well as dramatic. Check out the 93kWh battery pack in the assembly facility and then marvel at how Lotus has packaged it, in the middle of the car rather than underneath, including

"WITH THIS MUCH FIREPOWER, IT'S BEST TO EASE INTO THINGS"

all the power modules. Then look at the tunnels either side of it, expanses of space that help the Evija's aero efficiency but also cement its status as perhaps the most singular looking road car that is currently available.

Speaking of road, it's time to hit it. And we do actually have a plan. Our destination is Nice, on the Côte d'Azur, but as well as paying homage to that 1970s Lotus test route, we'll be dropping by a few places of note on the way – including Reims and the Circuit de Charade (locations of Lotus GP wins for Jim Clark and Jochen Rindt). It's Wednesday lunchtime by the time we leave, and we're booked on a plane home on Friday night. This is a distance and deadline to focus the mind.

With this much firepower at your command, it's best to ease into things. A combustion engine may be conspicuously absent but the Evija still immediately floods your senses. Thanks to its configuration, you sit low like you do in a conventional sports car. It's relatively easy to get in and out of, and user friendly once ensconced. The design team fought to include what they call 'Becker points', prominently rising front wings (named after legendary Lotus test driver Roger Becker). There's a central spine in the windscreen where the huge wiper parks itself, but you don't notice that after a while. And the F1-style steering wheel, which could have been a clumsy affectation, is actually effective. (Although not actively better. Turns out you can't reinvent the wheel.)

Out onto the A11, we head towards London. There are five drive modes on this thing, and escalating amounts of power and driver connection. Range is likely to become our default for reasons we'll get into, but it's also the one in which the car feels most inauthentic. It's wrong to talk in terms of throttle feel – the right pedal is more accurately in charge of torque demand – but it feels a bit sludgy in Range. City is sharper, Tour better still, but it's impossible to resist trying Sport on the arrow straight road through Thetford forest. Now we have 1,257lb ft of torque to experiment with, an unholy amount of energy, and enough to send the car warping forward in a way that makes the Millennium Falcon engaging hyperdrive look like Del Boy's three wheeler. It's an unusual sensation and an impressive single digit in the face of physics, but also risky assuming you don't want to end up behind bars. Or get battered round the head by your passenger. In truth, this sort of velocity isn't a wholly pleasant experience, but the rate of acceleration and the way it sustains it is phenomenal.

S. Ockendon A1306
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Services
(M25(J31)
Dartford Crossing

The Evija's battery is supplied by Coventry firm Hyperbat, the cells from American supplier Molicell. The battery pack alone weighs 718kg, about the same as an entire Lotus Elise S1. The Evija doesn't move like one of those, but nor does it feel like an Elise with a hippo strapped to its roof. It uses an 800V architecture, there are two motors within each electric drive unit on the front and rear axles, and two gearboxes. So all four wheels are driven independently, for an algorithmic dynamic bandwidth to boggle the mind. Marshalling this amount of power is a ferocious challenge. Remember, the parameters are set by the four bits of rubber on the corners of the car (bespoke Pirelli Trofeo Rs). Around 85 per cent of components are from UK suppliers.

Lotus has worked hard to imbue this awesome looking machine with the character, sensation and vibrations we take for granted in a combustion engined supercar. This much is apparent as we stop for our first charge, at Thurrock services in Essex. The Evija's EDUs – electronic drive units – emit an organic whine, deliberately unfiltered. It's a noise you don't notice so much on the track because you're focused on not crashing. But at motorway speeds it's a different matter, not least because the noise is naggingly insistent at 75mph. More soundproofing might be the order of the day.

And more range. Lotus claims 195 miles (WLTP) on a full charge, which is some way short of the early claims that we heard for the Evija. It's also some way short of reality, because you're mindful of not straying too far from Zap-Mapped rapid chargers, and also of not running the battery too low. Depleted cells are unhappy cells. Which means we're stopping with about 25 miles left, a pretty slender margin of comfort, and a scant two hours and 116 miles after we set off. A pattern may be set here...

At least we find a vacant and functioning 350kW charger at Gridserve's facility that sits close to the Dartford crossing, and we're on our way about 15 minutes later. Mind you, the price is seriously spicy: 85p per kWh means that getting the Evija back to its modest full charge costs £54.

The Channel tunnel next, where a busload of Czech schoolkids can't believe their eyes. It's a reminder that cars like this have a role to play as entertainment, something the Evija's brilliant design fully enables. The dihedral doors are pure concept car theatre. You can open them from the outside using the key fob or close them using a button on their under side. If you're inside, there's a button for each door on the roof header. Trouble is, they have a mind of their own and can become rather irritating. What would Colin Chapman think? Simplify and add lightness, that was his thing. The key lives in a little pocket in the centre console and its transponder demands that it sits in a specific way. Another mild frustration. A rearview camera and pop out side cameras add a techy dimension and ease the drama of reverse parking. Judging distance is still stressful, though.

Especially given the Evija's exotic construction. It's made entirely of carbon fibre, chassis, body panels and all, including the front subframes for total integrity and structural rigidity. The cockpit sits well within its bodywork, a layout that evokes early 1970s endurance racers, a generation that holds every car designer spellbound. There's a complex race bred inboard suspension, codeveloped by Multimatic. That includes a Formula One-style 'heave' damper to absorb the effect of the Evija's considerable downforce – an unbelievable 1,680kg at the car's 217mph vmax – while its overall aerodynamic properties are dictated by the air flowing not just over and under it, but also through it, as we've seen.

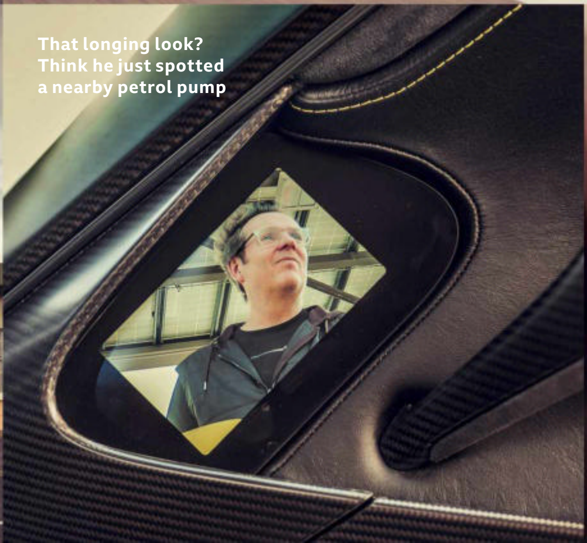
L'Action Automobile et To

LOTUS
CHARGING
24 %
RANGE
33
MILES
TIME TO 80%
00 10
HRS MINS

Enjoy this screen, because you'll be seeing it a whole lot

LOTUS
UK
A024 GLV
lotuscars.com

They were mostly just surprised at a Brit going abroad in this economy



That longing look? Think he just spotted a nearby petrol pump

engie
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LOTUS
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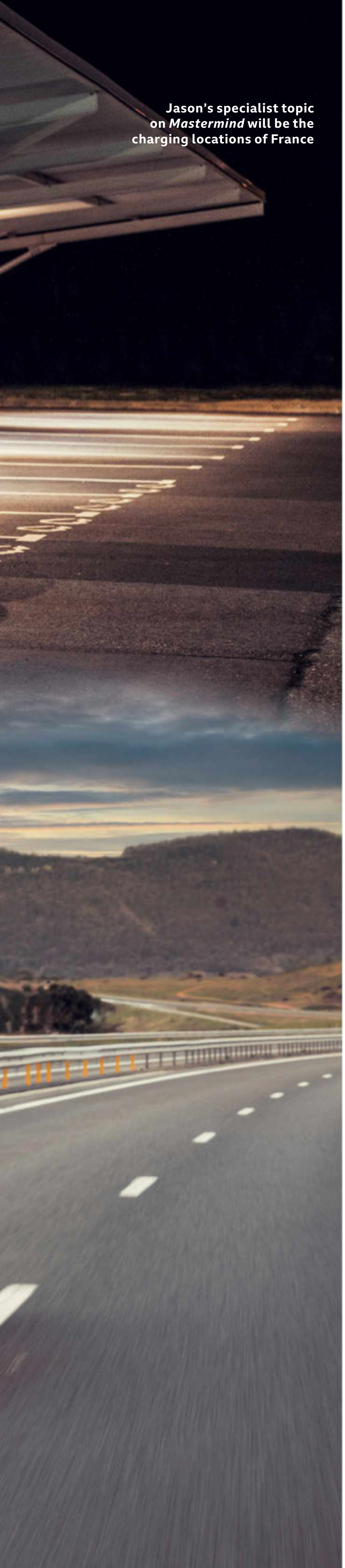
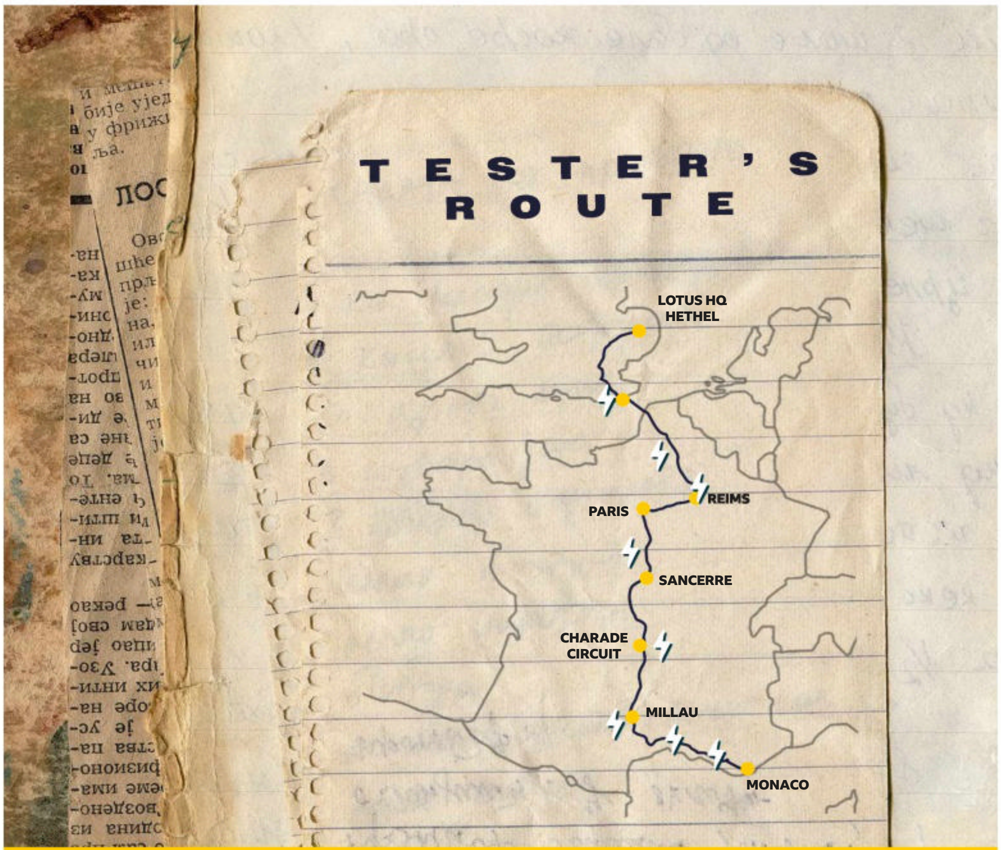
"A REAL WORLD RANGE OF 150 MILES IS SURELY CHOCOLATE TEAPOT STUFF"



Jason's specialist topic on *Mastermind* will be the charging locations of France



We leave the company's Hethel HQ on Wednesday morning bound for the French Riviera. We use the Channel Tunnel and push on to Reims. This was the scene of various F1 triumphs for Lotus, including Jim Clark's win in 1963. Then we head southwest towards the Circuit de Charade, a track aiming to become the world's first fully sustainable motorsport venue. From there, we overnight in Millau – home to the amazing viaduct over the Tarn gorge – and go south through Cévennes and Provence before winding up our journey in the Côte d'Azur. Beaulieu-sur-Mer, in fact, home to the Hôtel Métropole, an old school showbiz destination. We fly home…

Once we're in France, the odyssey can really begin. The Evija's interior echoes the exterior design, in the sense that it's defined by what's missing as much as by what's actually there. A refreshingly simple instrument binnacle sits on top of a carbon fibre exoskeleton, while a slender central spine – known as the 'ski jump' – houses a series of hexagons, each one triggering a different function. It's more concept thinking made real, and it mostly works, the function graphics coolly backlit. Until it stops working, that is. The AC glow disappears just as the weather heats up outside, and the indicators literally go on the blink.

France is well served by rapid chargers, which is a good thing because we're going to see a lot of them. Lotus reckons potential owners won't do the crazy distance we're attempting, but a real world range of about 150 miles is surely chocolate teapot stuff in terms of utility. We're not exactly blasting between *péages* either, although when the self restraint goes out the window the car shrinks distance like few other things out there. Hyper powerful electric cars are like time machines or teleportation devices.

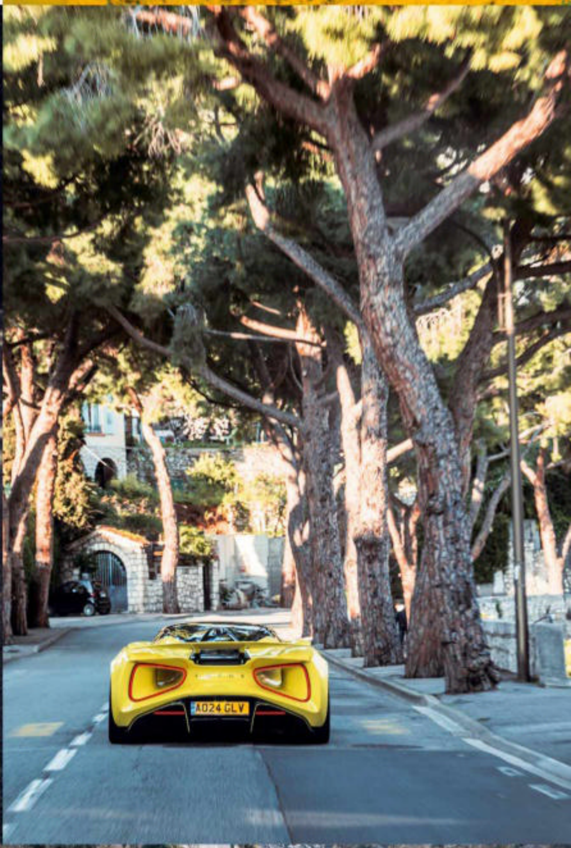
We skirt round Paris and pick up the A77 and then N7 through the Loire valley past Sancerre and Nevers. Charging stops five and six happen somewhere around here, the Evija's 1.6 miles per kWh energy consumption and suboptimal range distinctly hampering progress. It's also suffering repeated software glitches – we have a couple of engineers following us and they basically have to do the equivalent

LOTUS EVIJA

Price: £2.4m
Powertrain: four e-motors, 2,011bhp, 1,257lb ft
Transmission: 2spd auto, AWD
Performance: 0–62mph in <3.0secs, 0–186mph in <9.0secs, 217mph
Battery/range: 93kWh/195 miles
Weight: 1,884kg

EVIJA

LOTUS



> “IT’S BIGGER THAN ANYTHING CHAPMAN ENVISAGED, BUT STILL FEELS LIKE A LOTUS”

Ah, beautiful. And full of treacherous narrow lanes and angry French people

Evija brings a whole new meaning to being in a flap

BEAULIEU s/ MER
MONACO
Villa Grecque
KERYLOS

of a hard reset on a few occasions. I'm later told it's because I'm leaving the car in Sport mode when I should be flicking back into City configuration. Surely it should be able to absorb this? There is also a slight pause before the Evija unleashes all its horsepower in Sport, the electric vehicle equivalent of turbo lag perhaps, a gathering of thoughts as a zillion lines of code zoom around the mainframe. The pause is swiftly forgotten once you're at full tilt, but it should be seamless and instantaneous.

Our second overnight stop is in Millau, on the edge of the Cévennes national park, just the right side of midnight. Phew. There are two reasons for coming here. The first is to travel across (and beneath) the Millau viaduct, the world's tallest bridge at 343m, an engineering wonder of the world that was designed by the UK's very own superstar architect Norman Foster and opened in 2004. It spans the glorious Tarn gorge, used 290,000 tonnes of steel and concrete in its construction, and is held up by 1,500 tonnes of steel cable. This remains engineering at its most dazzling even 20 years on.

“AFTER 48 LONG HOURS AT THE WHEEL THE JURY IS STILL OUT”

It was constructed to relieve traffic congestion towards the Mediterranean, but ironically we dive off it and head east along the N107 instead.

What a road this is – that’s the second reason for coming here – and what a machine the Evija reveals itself to be in arguably its natural habitat. It’s bigger and heavier than anything Chapman and co ever envisaged but crucially still feels like a Lotus. It’s actually close to the McLaren 750S in terms of steering feel and linearity of response. The 750S was the best car I drove in 2024 and is *TG*’s reigning Speed Week champion, so this is high praise. Interestingly, the Evija’s steering is also electrohydraulic rather than fully electric, and there’s no regen on the braking, the big Lotus relying instead on carbon ceramics supplied by Brembo. It settles into a remarkable rhythm, the hydraulically operated, retractable rear wing and DRS finessing the aero and stabilising everything. Despite its vast complexity, there’s a delicious purity to its responses.

There’s magic here, no question. But charging for the umpteenth time and closing in on our destination, as many questions remain as there are answers. The world, we know, is refusing to fall in love with the vastly horsepowered hyper EV. This is an automotive genre that’s frankly pretty silly, at least until the battery tech serves up twice the energy density in a package that comes in at half the current weight.

Lotus also remains suspiciously coy about how many Evijas have found homes, but at £2.4m it’s unquestionably a tough sell. After 48 long hours at the wheel, the jury is still out. It’s mesmerising to look at, fast as hell, and handles spectacularly. But the motors are noisy, the range barely adequate, and the software issues 21st century incarnations of traditional Lotus, shall we say, foibles. The company reckons some Evijas will end up part of big collections, destined to be a static masterpiece and state of the art techno flagship. But the technology is moving fast and a Lotus, more than most other cars, exists to be driven. After 1,000 demanding miles, and for various disparate reasons, this one doesn’t go quite far enough.

RENAULT 5 TURBO 3E

EV WE'RE MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO DRIVING IN 2025

The facts are ridiculous. Here is an electric hatchback with only two seats and the potential to cost over £200k if you "take full advantage of the customisation on offer". One of these, or nine standard R5s? Something doesn't add up.

But lunacy is what the Renault 5 Turbo has always been about, its *raison d'être* stretching back to the 1980 original is to shock, amaze, be unruly and make no sense. This version is following the family business using ingredients from 2025.

And *quelle* ingredients they are. It has an aluminium chassis developed by Alpine, a 70kWh battery and 540bhp. It'll do 0–62mph in under 3.5secs, hit a 168mph top speed and it's RWD. And if that wasn't nonsensical enough, all that power comes from a pair of in-wheel motors.

The downside is they increase unsprung mass, but the benefits are many: it's a great tech spec USP, they deliver a stonking 3,500lb ft of torque and even more immediate throttle response than with traditional e-motors. There are weight and space savings on the rear axle too and you get separate control of each motor for precise torque vectoring, which is excellent for masking mass.

But there isn't much of that as the back seats don't exist and the body is all carbon fibre. Total weight is about 1,450kg, the same as the standard electric R5, which means a power to weight ratio of 372hp per tonne... more than an Audi R8 V10. Oh and it has a drift assist function as well as a rally style handbrake for skids. The only thing missing? The snail shaped thing in its name. **JR**

R5TURBO 3E
READY
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50

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

HONDA 0 SERIES

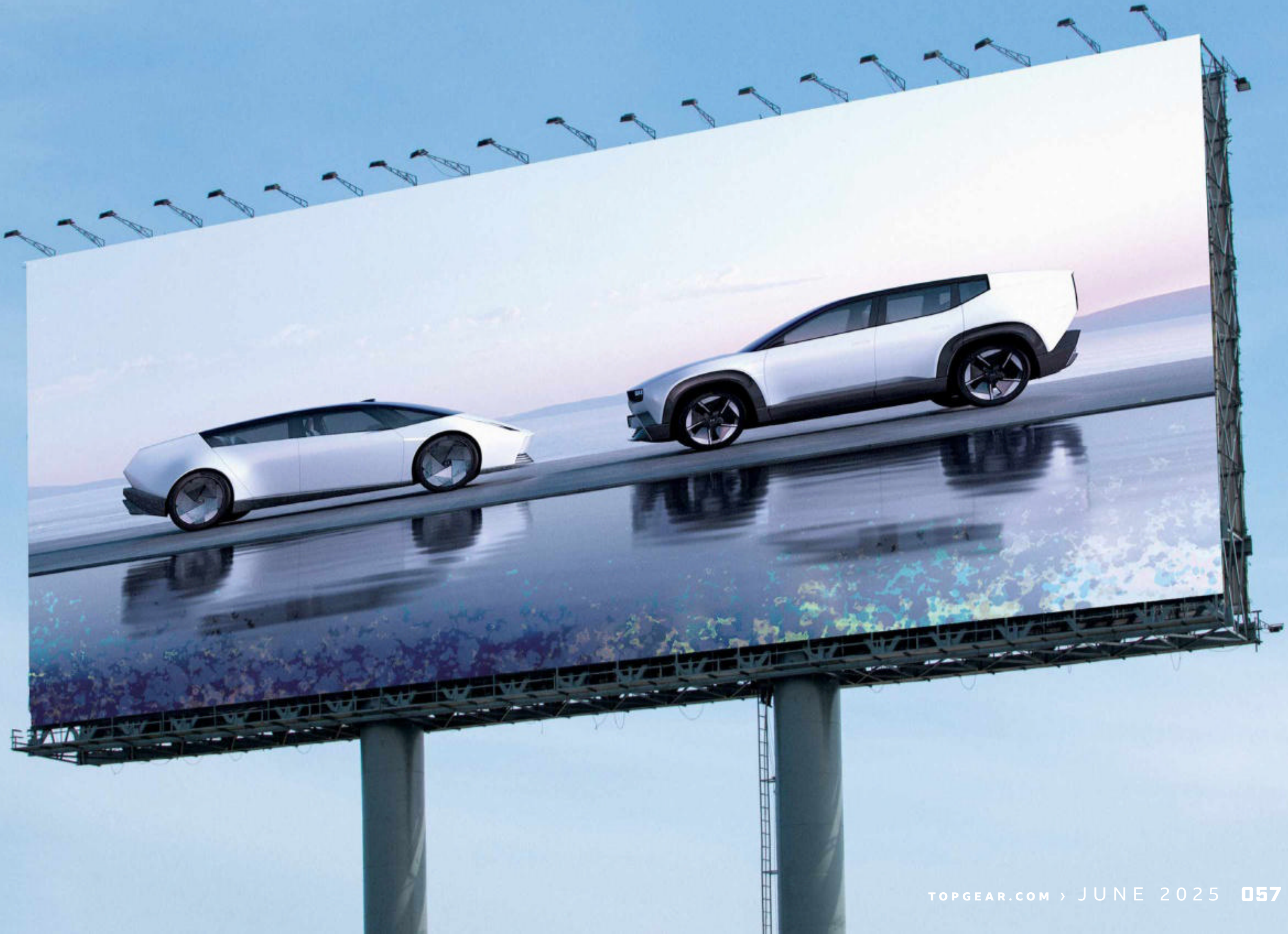
BEST EV DESIGN

If these two cars reach production exactly as they are, Honda won't be winning any awards for its naming strategy. Thankfully, the 0 Saloon and 0 SUV prototypes unveiled at CES 2025 both look incredible. They're gloriously futuristic in their design, and we're told that they're 95 per cent ready to enter the real world.

Honda's 0 Series plan includes no fewer than seven new models by 2030, but these will be the first two to arrive, with launches scheduled for 2026. And while the boxy SUV is interesting with its funky lights and estate-like rear end, it's the cyberpunk Saloon that we're seriously interested in. It's got the wedgy profile of a stretched Lamborghini Gallardo, and there's more than a hint of that old V10 bull in the headlights too. Only Honda has gone one better and fitted those lights with retractable covers for a modern take on pop-ups.

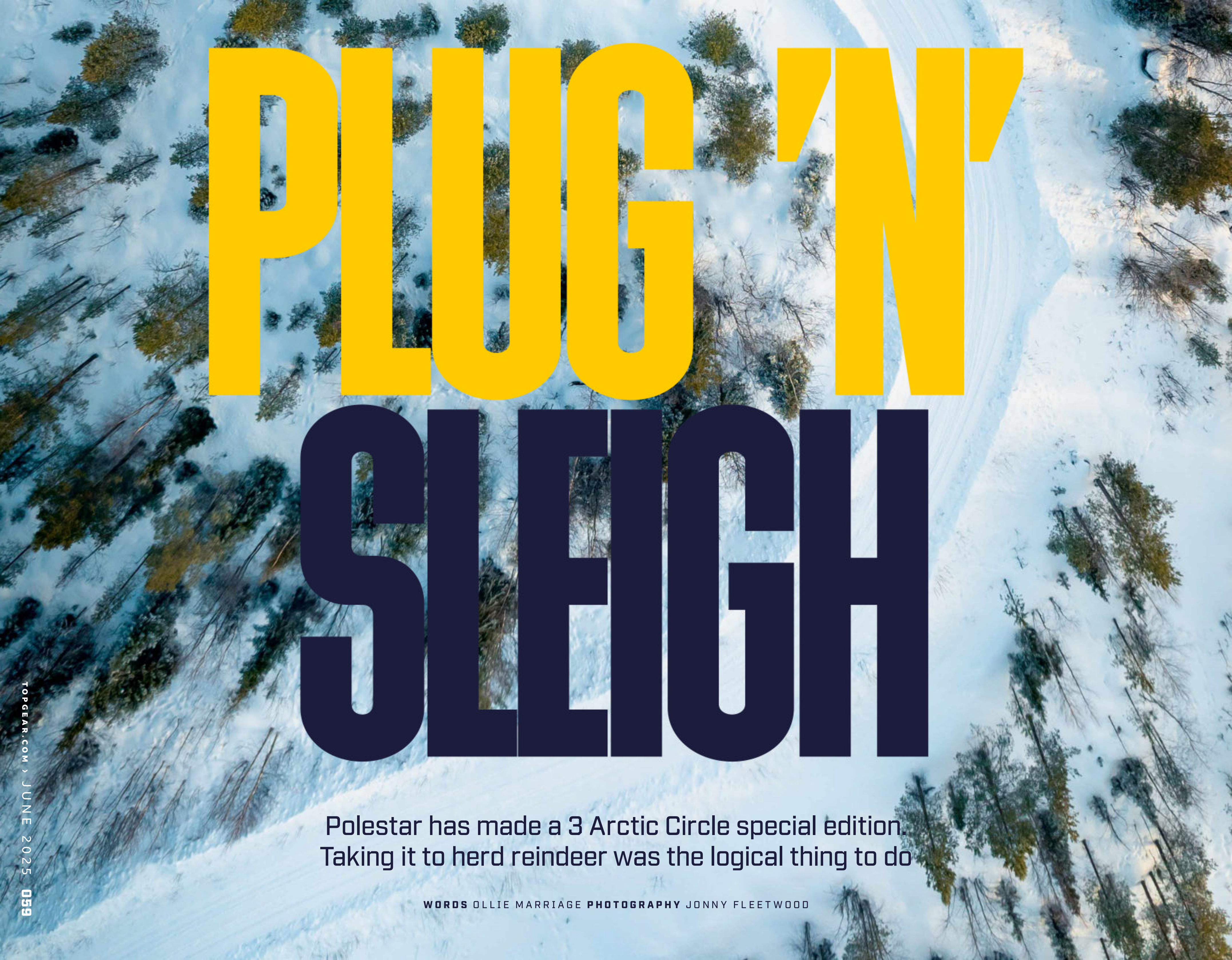
Inside, the prototype Saloon is fitted with four wraparound armchairs and a panoramic glass roof that's almost as long and wide as the car itself. Screens stretch across the width of the dash and a yoke steering wheel will likely be on offer thanks to the presence of drive by wire steering.

Honda says it's taking a "Thin, light and wise" approach to developing the 0 Series, and it'd certainly be wise to get this pair of EVs onto our roads ASAP. Imagine seeing these at the supermarket – you'd be forgiven for thinking you're about to be knocked down by a youth on a hoverboard. **GP**



THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

BEST EV SUV



PLUG 'N' SLEIGH

Polestar has made a 3 Arctic Circle special edition. Taking it to herd reindeer was the logical thing to do

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

‘I THINK I WILL NAME HIM AFTER YOU.’

I think this might be hasty. For starters I don’t believe Ollie the reindeer’s future prospects extend to ‘named pet’. And I think his recent bout of affectionate behaviour has less to do with my Sami tendencies than a peculiar hypnosis with the colour of my jacket. Not for the first time, I wonder if Rickard is teasing me.

Rickard Länta is a Sami reindeer herder. It’s tough up here, up above the Arctic Circle. Sure it looks pretty and bright, a friendly wilderness of trees and snow that I’m sure offers up enough sustenance and protection to be survivable *if you know what you’re doing*. Yeah, about that. All I’ve done is apply technology to this situation: GPS mapping, technical fabrics, electric motors, phone signal and so on. What I’m lacking is knowledge. Meanwhile, the only technology Rickard appears to have at his disposal are the three knives worn at the waist of his heavy, tough clothing. I don’t believe his knowledge is lacking.

The standard Polestar 3 is technology turned up to 10. It’s a connected car that successfully channels cutting edge solutions, while also being a beautifully designed, clean driving and thoroughly useful SUV. That’s why we’ve chosen it as EV SUV of the Year. But up here I need more, which must be why Polestar created the 3 Arctic Circle, adding the studded tyres, snow ladders, shovel and extra spotlights that turn this car into more of a survival cell. All of which might just come in very handy.

The plan is to use the ‘Arctic Circle’ to herd reindeer within the Arctic Circle. It didn’t have to be this Arctic Circle mind you: Polestar has built three Arctic Circle cars, the others predictably based on the 2 and 4. All have been treated to suspension lifts, OZ rally wheels with studded tyres, custom Öhlins dampers, Recaro bucket seats, mud flaps, tow hooks and so on. So you, like me, are imagining they’re trite nonsense, mere show ponies.

But that’s to ignore the input of a chap called Joakim Rydholm, Polestar’s mildly obsessive, entirely cheerful head of driving dynamics. This is a man who has been known to travel around test tracks harnessed in the boot of cars while trying to track down squeaks and vibrations, “and sometimes sat in the frunk too, touching damper mounts and bushings with my fingers”. Rallying since he was in short trousers, Polestar’s reputation for clean, crisp dynamics is entirely down to him.

So when it came to developing the Arctic Circle one-offs, he applied his rallying nous. Despite Polestar’s CEO specifically telling him *not* to mess around with bits of metalwork that would interfere with practicality, the 2 wears a strut brace across the boot and the frunks of all three are interrupted by strengthening bars linking damper mounts to crash structure. The suspension has been retuned, the 4 now has a hydraulic handbrake and, well, I have an ice lake and three cars to play with.

The aim is to choose one to use for this adventure. I know before I get there that’s going to be the 3, but there is no more fun you can have in a car than sliding around on an ice lake. So I spend the morning pretending to agonise over choice while hooting with laughter, towing rooster tails and nerfing snowbanks. What’s more, the cars are fun to drive. OK, there’s a point mid-morning when a chap by the name of Stig Blomqvist turns up in a ratty old 3-Series and that looks like heaven, but the Polestars, despite their weight, are surprisingly deft, well balanced and uncannily good at working out where the torque vectoring needs to send the power. Four wheel drifts ahoy.

I regretfully leave the lake with its metre thick ice and set off to track down Rickard. Apart from the crackle of studs on surface at low speed, handing over to a slight roof rack whistle as we hit main roads,

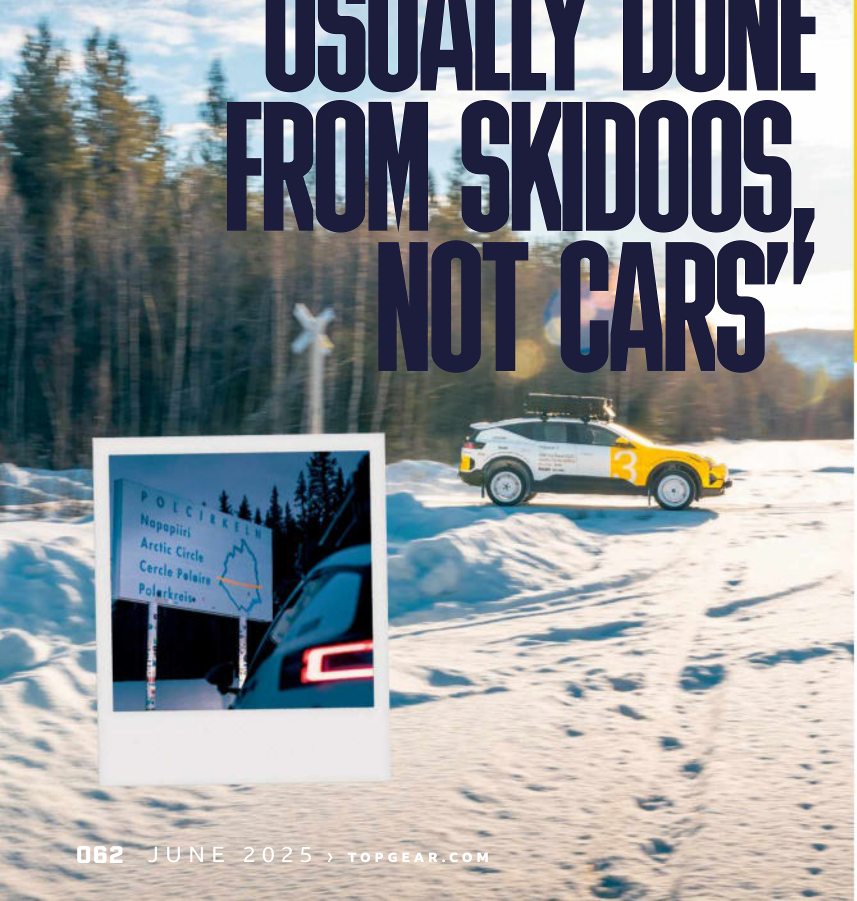
Polestar 3
TAT Ice Race 2025
Arctic Circle edition
brembo
OZ
ÖHLINS
RECARO
3

Polestar / F.A.T.
brembo
SAF 87G

When you've had your nose in the biscuit tin and get caught red handed

"HERDING IS USUALLY DONE FROM SKIDOOS, NOT CARS"

Six inches to the left and there's a garden gnome buried under there


POLCIRKELN
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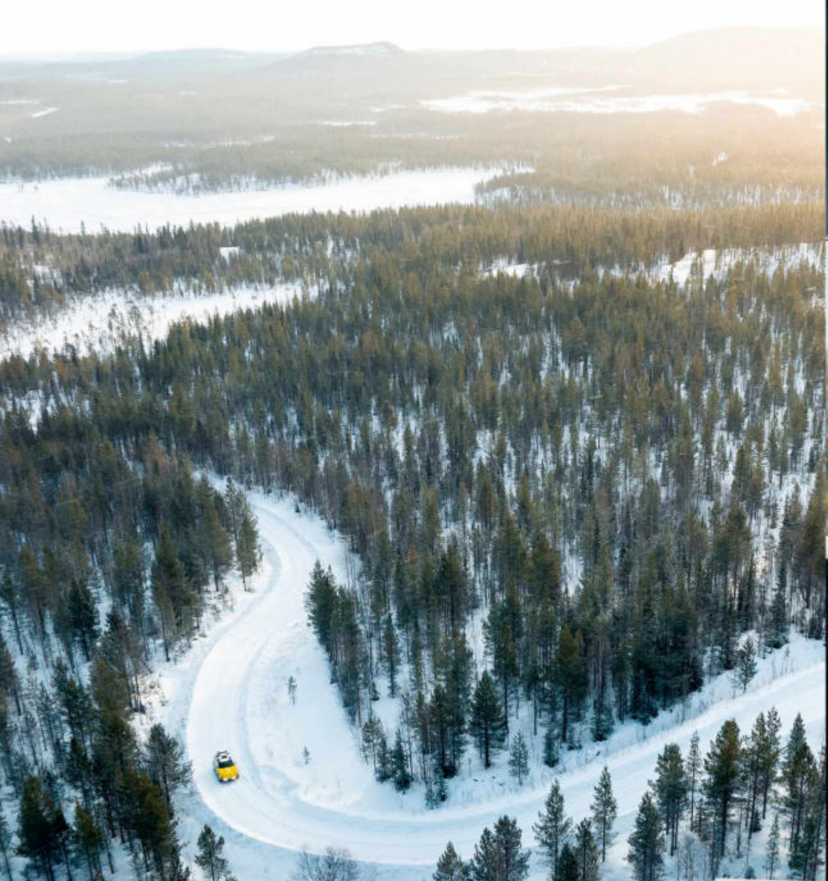
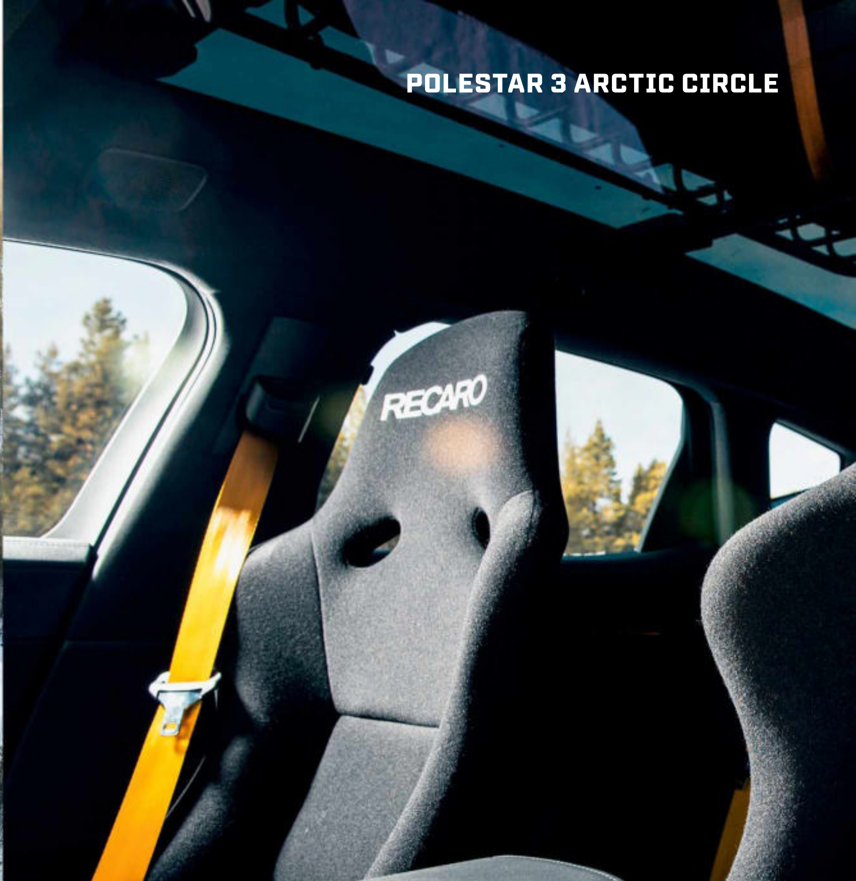




Bucket seats keep you secure, good to know when there's lots of sliding around on the menu

O.Z RACING
O.Z RACING

> “ELECTRIC POWER IS SO PERFECT HERE, IT FITS THIS PLACE WELL”

progress is super smooth. Snow has that effect, dulling noise. But the ride is majestic, the 3 plush and composed, looser limbed than the standard road car, sinking more into its travel as it barges along forest tracks, dappled sunlight twinkling through the trees.

We stop a few times. I can’t resist a bomb into a snowdrift or breaking out the binoculars to see if that branch was actually a set of antlers. We head up a hill to get a vantage over the landscape. Below, nothing moves as far as the eye can see. It’s so still and quiet that even the landscape seems to be hibernating. Electric power is perfect here, no nasty, polluting hydrocarbons pumping into the pristine air, no vapour clouds, no noise. The Polestar fits this place well.

There’s a problem or two with my plan though: a) at this time of year reindeer largely herd themselves and b) any herding is done from skidoos, not cars. Turns out reindeer don’t follow roads. So essentially what I’ve done is drive as far as I can to the general vicinity of some reindeer, who then have to be herded towards the car so Jonny can get pictures of them together. Not quite what I had in mind.

In the winter Rickard, his son Jovva-Anta and the rest of his family are merely semi-nomadic. The reindeer don’t wander too far or too fast as they have to dig down through the snow to find the lichen and fungi that sustain them. There are no boundaries, no fences up here, but each herder is expected to keep their reindeer in their own area, “each day we have to patrol the edge to keep track of the animals and make sure they haven’t strayed and that’s a big job… my area is 60km around”.

I want to ask how many reindeer he has, but the one thing I know about the Sami is it’s rude to ask. Why? Because it’s like me asking you how much money is in your bank account. In many ways reindeer are still their currency. I get around to it indirectly by asking how many reindeer are needed to earn a living from. “One person needs about 300 reindeer to survive,” says Rickard. “Because each year you need to slaughter 75 or 100 to earn enough money to live. A family needs 500–600.” So why not breed more? “The grazing won’t be good enough for all of them, and then you don’t have good quality reindeer, which aren’t worth as much and then you get a reputation…” His voice tails off. Reindeer meat is valuable, fetches around £8 a kilo, a whole carcass around £600 as every last bit of it is used. The horns are ground up (“in Asia they think it’s an aphrodisiac”, Rickard tells me with a bemused smile), the skins, fur, bones, feet, even the velvet that falls from the horns, it’s all used.

Polestar 3
Ice Race 2025
Arctic Circle edition
brembo
ÖHLINS
RECARO

POLESTAR 3 ARCTIC CIRCLE

Price: it's a one-off
Powertrain: two e-motors, 510bhp, 671lb ft
Transmission: 1spd auto, AWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 4.5secs, 130mph
Battery/range: 111kWh/ 352 miles
Weight: 2,600kg (approx)

The herding happens from March to May and is a social affair. Families come together to drive their animals to higher pastures in the mountains about 300km away. I assume they head there because the grazing is better, but Rickard puts me straight. "Mosquitos. The reindeer hate them like we do, so we get them away from the lakes and water where they breed." The calves are born in early summer (which marks the start of the Sami year), the bull males, of which there are around 14–18 in a family herd, fight for dominance in September, the herds return to lowlands for winter and the process starts again.

Ollie is big – eight years old and 80–90kg. Reindeer are usually smaller and younger when they're slaughtered, but as a dominant bull he's had a stay of execution. He seems quiet and docile, mostly happy to be led around. "Yeah, he's castrated, it makes them much calmer." Rickard hoists his trousers and my eyes flick to his knives. "We use the knife for everything," he says, interpreting my glance. And he really does, from nicking the ears to identify them, to cutting wood for fire, to um, yeah, invasive surgery.

It's a peaceful, separate existence, up here in Europe's last remaining wilderness, and yet the outside world intrudes. Rickard has been fighting to prevent poorly regulated forestry which has been upsetting the ecosystem, and there's tension between Sweden and Sápmi – the Sami name for this land.

The herders' way of life is diminishing. "Only, I think, 15 or 20 per cent of Sami want this," he tells me, gesturing into the woods. "Do you know where the biggest Sami population is now? Stockholm." Rickard's son is one of the few keeping the tradition alive. "I tell you how I knew he would follow me. I gave him a mobile phone, because, you know, he's a teenager, and two weeks later he lost the stupid thing and came to me and asked for another. And I said, 'Well, I can't afford to buy you one now, but what I can do is go into the woods, slaughter two of the reindeer and then use that money to buy you a phone.' He went away, and came back 10 minutes later and said, 'No Daddy don't slaughter the reindeer, we need them.' That was very encouraging for me."

Rickard admires the Polestar, but his appreciation of it is akin to mine of his reindeer. Unless it's one with a red nose, I've got no idea how to assess or appreciate it. For me the 3 Arctic Circle – and the regular 3 we rate highly enough to give this award to – are each perfectly in tune with this still, silent landscape. But this isn't a playground for Rickard, it's a working environment. There's no room for romanticism. And none for a reindeer with a name.

MISC

The other highs and lows in the electric world that have caught our eye in the past 12 months

WORDS SAM BURNETT

Ice cool award

RENAULT R17

Maybe someone pulled the wrong box out when they were looking for Christmas decorations at Renault HQ, but the French carmaker has finally realised it used to make interesting cars. While our fingers remain crossed for an electric reimagining of the 1984 Espace, the R17 Electric Restomod x Ora Ïto (its full title) is a neat plumbing of the back catalogue in conjunction with French designer Ïto that was displayed at the 2024 Paris Motor Show last October. The original Renault 17 is a barely remembered two door coupe from the 1970s, but a revitalised R17 seems like it would be just the thing in the 2020s.

Rangemaster award

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA

When you see a concept car as cool and as interesting as the Mercedes EQXX you don't have any hope that it will really go into production, because we don't deserve nice things. But Mercedes is doing the next best thing and folding in what it's learned from the project in its production electric offerings. The new CLA arrives later in 2025 and the RWD 250+ version of the car will manage an eye watering 492 miles of range from its 85kWh battery. It uses 800V tech too, which means 10 minutes on a 350kW plug will get you an extra 200 miles. Does still have those stupid giant screens inside though.

Gerald Ratner achievement award

TESLA

Quick recap for those at the back – famed British CEO Gerald Ratner shot to notoriety following a speech in 1991 when he described the products sold by his well known jewellery chain stores as "total crap". In two words he wiped £500m off the company value. Next he hired a new chairman to steady the ship who then sacked him. Why is this interesting? Because 'doing a Ratner' might shortly be replaced with 'doing an Elon'. Tesla's lost over *£600bn* in value and sales are down in double digit percentages just in 2025 so far thanks to Musk's controversial work outside of Tesla HQ. Makes Gerald look lazy, really.

J-turn of the year

PORSCHE MACAN

Porsche was clear when it launched the new Macan towards the end of 2024 that it would remain electric only. It's committed to going zero emissions and all that... although Stuttgart's finest carmaker has also pursued a strategy similar to something Fiat would do, with the old petrol version on life support just in case. And what's that? Seems like electric sales aren't going as quickly as they should be, and there are whispers that Porsche is now developing a new Macan-sized SUV powered by combustion engines but definitely not called the Macan. Not a full U-turn, but a screeching petrol powered J-turn perhaps.

World domination award

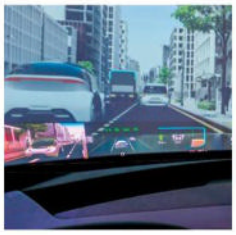
BYD

Look at BYD's range in the UK and you come away underwhelmed, but it's a company on the up and it would be foolish to count it out. In 2024, BYD overtook Tesla as the world's largest EV manufacturer, with sales up 58 per cent in the first quarter of 2025 while its rival's numbers have been tanking. The fascinating thing about BYD is how responsive it is – people made fun of the 'Build Your Dreams' slogan on the back of its cars and the badges were gone in months. Almost as fast as the new 1,000kW 'flash charging' tech the company just unveiled that'll see megawatt chargers adding 250 miles of range in just five minutes.

Concept of the year

VOLKSWAGEN ID.EVERY1

Finally, the people behind the people's car have got some ideas about how to make an electric one. This smart looking spiritual successor to the Up will arrive in 2027 looking similar to the ID.Every1 concept, its 38kWh battery offering a range of over 150 miles and a simplified design cutting out anything unnecessary including weight. But not buttons, those are in fact being brought back in an unusual display of wisdom – a wacky concept car idea we can all get behind. The best thing about the Up/ID.1/Insert name here is the price – VW is aiming for a sub-£20k sticker that'll make the car extra affordable for most buyers.



***TG* Tech award**

HYUNDAI MOBIS HOLOGRAPHIC HUD

We all know actual hover cars will be the sign we've finally arrived in the future, but there will be stepping stones along the way – things like the holographic HUD that Hyundai Mobis (part of the Hyundai group) and Zeiss unveiled at CES in January 2025. The mind boggling tech turns the whole windscreen into a holographic display using a special plastic film and dashtop projector. Imagine the instrument panel and infotainment displays below with an augmented reality satnav above. They reckon it'll be in cars by 2027, which feels a long way off in the future right now...

Glow up of the year

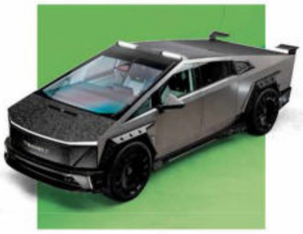
BMW NEUE KLASSE

BMW doubled down in the past few years on its divisive design and chonked up range of SUVs – it's expensive being that wrong. But just in time to save the company in our collective estimation is the first of the company's so called 'Neue Klasse' cars. The iX3 SUV (yet to be shown, the pic above is a *TG* render) heralds a new design for BMW's EVs, and fresh thinking across the board – better technology, innovative interiors, etc. It's not the first new class, the term was first used back in the 1960s for a range of cars that brought BMW back from the edge of collapse and introduced the signature Hofmeister kink to the world.

Charging fail

MOTORWAY CHARGING FUND

The conventional wisdom is that it's charging infrastructure holding back growth of the UK's EV market – not high purchase cost or the steady removal of any incentives. Which was why in 2020 chancellor Rishi Sunak announced a £950m scheme to pay for rapid chargers at motorway service stations. Fast forward five years and it turns out that not a penny of it has been spent, because the competition regulators thought the scheme might not be fair and the government didn't get around to thinking up new ideas. Something to think about next time you're queuing for a plug.



Burn my eyes award

MANSORY CYBERTRUCK

Nobody would have said that the Tesla Cybertruck is a looker – every time Elon Musk is seen in public with one he gets someone to smash the windows – but Mansory has taken the challenge of creating the world's ugliest cars to a whole new level with its take on the Texan carmaker's angular pickup truck. Mansory has always maintained a consistent 'more is more' approach to styling, gluing extra bodywork on any clear flat surface that's available using carbon that seems to have been patterned after a laminate kitchen worktop from Ikea. None of which is helping our theory that Mansory is an elaborate prank on the car world.

ELLANEOUS

MERCEDES-BENZ

G580e

The alchemists at Mercedes have mixed the G's years of experience with their electric knowhow and created something… better

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

It's still a G. Looks like a G, feels like a G, shimmies and shudders like a G, it's engineered like a G, off roads like a G. Actually, it off roads better than any G before.

The G580 with EQ technology. Sigh. That's even worse than EQG. Nothing can get itself into quite such a twist over names as a German car company frantically charting a way through this Southern Ocean of new technology. But Merc's on the right track. This electric G is just part of the range, as deserving of its spot in the lineup as the G400d or daft G63. So we'll call it the G580e then.

First point to make: let's hear it for engineering. We tend to think that because things don't go bang under the bonnet, electric cars are the product of lab tests and computer programming. Here's one that'll put you straight. It's the most mechanical EV we've ever driven, yet there's not a diff lock in sight. Instead each wheel is equipped with its own motor and two-speed gearbox.

Which means more control. What Mercedes has done is team the control and precision that electric offers with the robustness, durability and proven capability that only a ladder frame can deliver. Where the combustion G has to run your throttle demands through an engine, gearbox and driveshafts before the reaction gets to the wheel, here the input to output time is instant. You feel like your foot is connected directly to the wheels.

But it's not just you. It's also the astonishing way the car apportions torque to each wheel. It's like having four individual throttles, because this is a world beyond traction and stability control. There are no locking differentials of course, but you do get the familiar electronic clicking as the systems cut in to work out which individual wheel to send power to. But in the rough, it's like you've got an off road guru hidden in the dash – the G580e appears to think its way out of challenging situations.

So I gave it one. We wanted to get off road shots, so I blithely ignored the fact it had arrived wearing road tyres. The mud was slippery and sticky, the ruts were deep, I got my line wrong, (that's it, opposite) I have no excuse. By all rights I was stuck fast across a set of ruts.

Four of us stared glumly at the situation, pondering the walk back across the quagmire to the salvation of a towrope. But being stubborn and recognising a testing opportunity now I'd been smacked around the chops by it, I set to work. Or rather the G580e did. Rocking back and forth, it seemed to work out for itself what it needed to do to extract itself from the position its incompetent driver had inserted it into. And five minutes later I was free.

Yes, it's ludicrously heavy and almost comically inefficient (1.6 miles per kWh, people). Yes, most will buy this 4x4 simply to do G turns: £200k distilled into a single gimmick. But make no mistake, this is one of the most formidable off roaders there's ever been.

BEST EV OFF ROADER

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

G 580
KT74 PDY

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

BEST LUXURY EV

ROLLS ROYCE BLACK BADGE SPECTRE

The Black Badge Spectre is the most powerful Rolls-Royce ever built… it also gets chassis tweaks and the option to go full send on the configurator. Like the standard car it has two electric motors, one on each axle, meaning 4WD and 577bhp in normal running. However, hitting a button on the steering wheel activates a new 'Infinity mode' and that unlocks a further 73bhp for a total of 650bhp. But there's more! Spirited mode (accessed by pushing the brake and throttle together, then releasing the brake) swells torque from 660lb ft to 793lb ft and is, essentially, launch control. LAUNCH CONTROL! IN A ROLLS-ROYCE!

None of which suggests it should win Best Luxury EV. However, where this Black Badge could have stumbled is by eroding some of that plushness that impressed us in the standard Spectre, swapping refinement for pointless cornering speed and roll control… but it hasn't, it's all still there. Sure, you've got a couple of modes to talk about with your pals over a quick bite at Nobu, which 25-year-old billionaires will love, but the essential Rolls-Royceness remains… now with added bragging rights. **JR**

BEST EV ESTATE

BMW i5 TOURING

In the old world order, you bought a Mercedes executive estate for a luxury experience, or an Audi for all round business express completeness. A BMW wagon was the outside choice. For class leading drive, you'd probably have to put up with a pokey boot or lumpy ride.

In the electric age, BMW's turned that on its head. While we're still waiting for Mercedes to even bother building a battery powered long roof, and Audi's first effort at an Avant e-tron doesn't ride well enough, the enormous breadth of smug ability served up by BMW's vast i5 Touring means the rest frankly needn't have bothered.

Yes, it's an expensive bit of kit, with prices starting at £70,000. You can have the Audi for a lot less. But the i5 isn't just a versatile wagon. It's also a luxury barge, a magnificent cruiser, practical yet hushed and cushioned like a Rolls-Royce wearing a boiler suit. This is probably as close to an estate limousine we're likely to get.

Don't be fooled into thinking it can also be a sports car. Yes, there's an M-ified version with twin motors, but the usual EV caveat applies: it's heavier, pricier, and needs charging 50 miles sooner. Stick with the RWD, single motor 335bhp eDrive40 version for a real world 300 miles with steady driving and you'll have exactly what this class of car was dreamed up for: a consummate, crushingly competent all rounder. **OK**

How low can you go?

WORDS SAM BURNETT

The Dacia Spring and Leapmotor T03 are the two cheapest (proper) electric cars on the market right now – time for a pennies and shillings showdown

	LEAPMOTOR T03		**DACIA SPRING**	
✓	At just £15,995 the T03 is a bargain – there's just the one spec but it comes with a crazy amount of kit, like adaptive cruise and a pano sunroof	**HOW MUCH?**	The Spring range starts at £14,995, but don't buy that car – realistically you're looking at £17k if you want fast charging and decent infotainment	✗
✓	Yes it has the bigger battery at 37.3kWh and offers 165 miles of range, but its official rating of 3.8mpkWh is disappointing. Will charge at 45kW	**HOW FAR?**	Teeny 26.8kWh battery will give you range anxiety just thinking about it, but 140 miles of range and 4.6mpkWh aren't too bad. Only charges at 30kW	✗
✗	The T03 has the air of a confused Maltese, and the classic proportions of a late 1990s city car. But who has 'knockoff Hyundai i10' on their vision board?	**HOW DOES IT LOOK?**	The Spring is altogether more aggressive than its budget rival – it's giving angry robopug. But like a cheap aftershave it can't hide its cut price roots	✓
✗	Perhaps your grandma might get a bit jealous of you rolling around town in a T03, but we can absolutely guarantee that no one else will be	**IS IT COOL?**	On the one hand, the Spring is still a Dacia, but there's something a bit fun about it. And you'll enjoy showing off all those YouClip accessories inside	✓
✓	Got somewhere to be? Boy racers won't be flocking to the T03, but its 12.7secs 0–62mph acceleration does look rather perky in this company	**HOW FAST?**	There are two power outputs here – 44bhp and 64bhp. The former does 0–62mph in 19.1secs. It's worth the extra £1k to knock that down to 13.7	✗
✗	You'll need to learn to pack lighter when it comes to living with the T03's tiny little 208-litre boot. The cabin lacks any interesting storage options too	**HOW MUCH ROOM?**	You can shop until you drop with the Spring's huge 308-litre boot (it's not very big). There's just about room for four inside, but it's comfortable with two	✓
✗	It's a little bit stilted. Not a disaster, especially around town, but it suffers small car syndrome, and gets buffeted by our turbulent road surfaces	**HOW MUCH FUN?**	The Spring is actually surprisingly fun to drive. Not so much for passengers, there's a lot of lean. It's a bit like driving a modernised version of a 2CV	✓

BEST BARGAIN EV **DACIA SPRING**

INTO THE RED

BEST EV CROSSOVER

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

Can a completely normal electric family hatchback drive coast to coast across the Australian Outback? Welcome to *TopGear*'s most ambitious electric roadtrip yet...

WORDS OLLIE KEW **PHOTOGRAPHY** DEAN SMITH

STUART HWY
Coober Pedy A87
Alice Springs
EYRE HWY
A1 Whyalla
Pt Lincoln
Ceduna
AUSTRALIAN ARID LANDS
BOTANIC GARDEN 3

NSW
FNZ·67Y
EV

AMPOL
Spud's

By day the Outback is vast and terrifying, while by night it's vast, dark and terrifying

Welcome to the
OUTBACK
southaustralia.com

This is one of the few tourist destinations that actually *does* look like its picture

In Australia, almost hitting a kangaroo with your car is what's known as a jump scare

ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY YEARS AGO,

the luxuriously bearded explorer John McDouall Stuart needed three attempts to complete the first northerly expedition across Australia. About five minutes into his successful mission, he was kicked in the head and lightly trampled by a startled horse. Being the hardest known form of human – a Victorian Scotsman – Stuart refused to go to hospital and was instead stretchered for almost a third of the 2,000 mile odyssey.

I am not the hardest known form of human. I am a part-avocado, 'ask YouTube how to erect shelves' millennial. This attempt to retrace Stuart's steps in an electric hatchback at the first time of asking is also likely to be a headache.

The road I'll use is named in McDouall's honour: the Stuart Highway. It lasted until the late 1980s before it was fully paved. Speed limits weren't enforced until 2007. Usually raw distance is the enemy of any EV roadtrip, and we've got plenty of that – 1,920 miles from Adelaide, capital of South Australia to Darwin, biggest city in the Northern Territory. But for the next four and a half days the environment itself is a challenge for almost any car. We're spearing straight into the Australian Outback. A respect demanding wilderness largely untouched by phone signal, teeming with deadly animals, where summer temperatures can soar past 40°C during the day and drop below freezing after dark.

But it's mild in Adelaide this morning and our base spec Kia EV3 (with £3k Long Range battery upgrade) promises 400 miles on its full charge. The local dealership's lent us a spare wheel (EV3s are only shipped with the emergency foam) and we've bagged an extra cable to hook up to rural three phase power outlets at caravan parks if the charger network is a letdown. All that plus photography and video gear, rations, bottled water and a hefty towrope is bundled into our diesel SUV support car – carefully selected for its 3.5 tonne haulage capacity. You don't stroll off into the Outback without a contingency plan. And the less weight the Kia has to carry, the better.

Adelaide's traffic flows smoothly and we're in Port Augusta by lunchtime, a sleepy nondescript town reluctant to play up to its 'gateway to the Outback' status. As there's a 200kW charger by the river, we replenish. Pitstop strategy isn't like a combustion car, where you drive until the fuel light blinks *then* think about finding a filling station. We need to stay topped up, so if a charger lets us down, we've got enough juice to make it to the next one. Which is sometimes five hours away.

Putting Port Augusta and civilisation in the rearview mirror, it's fascinating to watch nature basically give up as we officially enter the Outback. Verges rich in trees and grasses fade to arid scrub with the occasional broccoli headed tuft and grey bleached bark. The temperature's not risen above the mid 20s, but I'm glad the entry level EV3 Air doesn't bother with a greenhouse effect sunroof, so I can run the aircon at idle. It's reporting a healthy 4.3 miles per kWh, meaning a maximum range of around 348 miles. Maybe this'll be easy? Easier than driving an electric Lotus to the Riviera. I relax and cue up Men at Work from a saved playlist as phone reception dwindles away.

Our overnight stop is Spud's Roadhouse, 300 miles from our origin point. Could've made it in one charge, but why risk it? Spud's has a rapid charger and the EV3 is fully juiced less than two hours after we arrive to the first of several spectacular Outback sunsets.

A roadhouse is a deeply Aussie phenomenon, a sort of service station/motel/truck stop spliced with a pub. We dine on burgers, guffaw at the outstandingly rude gift shop merch and retire to rooms appointed like Soviet prison cells.

We leave at dawn to make use of the coolest time of day. Why not just drive through the night? Because unless you're a 200-tonne road train sporting bull bars Mad Max would blush at, you stay off the Outback highways after dark to avoid Australia's deadliest animal. Forget sharks, snakes and scorpions – more Australians are killed every year in traffic accidents involving kangaroos than encounters with any other creature. It has a palpable effect on Aussie insurance premiums and as we set a course northward, the fresh death toll scattered across the road is appalling. Every hundred yards there's a burst kangaroo, innards readily snacked on by well fed birds. Given 'roos are classed as a pest in their home country they're mourned as much as you care about a splatted fly on your windscreen, but it's a relief when we happen across some live ones hopping about in the scrub a few hours later.

Buzz Aldrin eloquently summed up the lunar moonscape as "magnificent desolation". I think I know how he felt. It's an almost dead landscape – nothing but iron oxide coloured dust, the occasional gnarled outbreak of scrub and an indistinct horizon glistening with heat haze. Out here a car isn't just a necessity, it's a lifeline. The Kia just trucks along. The aircon blows ice cool, albeit knocking the efficiency down to 3.7mpkWh. No numb bum after a four hour stint says good things about the cheapest version's seats. It exudes a grownup, big car feel and I like the mature composed ride, the minimal wind noise, the sense it's been engineered like Golfs used to be. A sign of our remoteness comes in the form of a, um, sign. A yellow one warning to share the road with aircraft. Sections of the Stuart Highway are widened to act as

COOBER PEDY
WELCOME TO
PECULIAR KNOB
MINE
ENTRANCE
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL
ONLY

They watched *Mad Max* round here and thought it was a documentary…

runways for the Royal Flying Doctor Service – the Outback's jet plane ambulance. I keep an eye on the sky but even wedge tailed eagles can't be bothered to take to the air out here.

By opal mining hotspot Coober Pedy temperatures are in the 'run for cover' zone and we have a decision to make. Either stop at a painfully slow charger a hundred or so miles north or bypass the inconvenience and make for Ghan, a whopping 300 miles away and charge while we sleep. This is it then, the first hypermile leg. Aircon off, panel gaps taped.

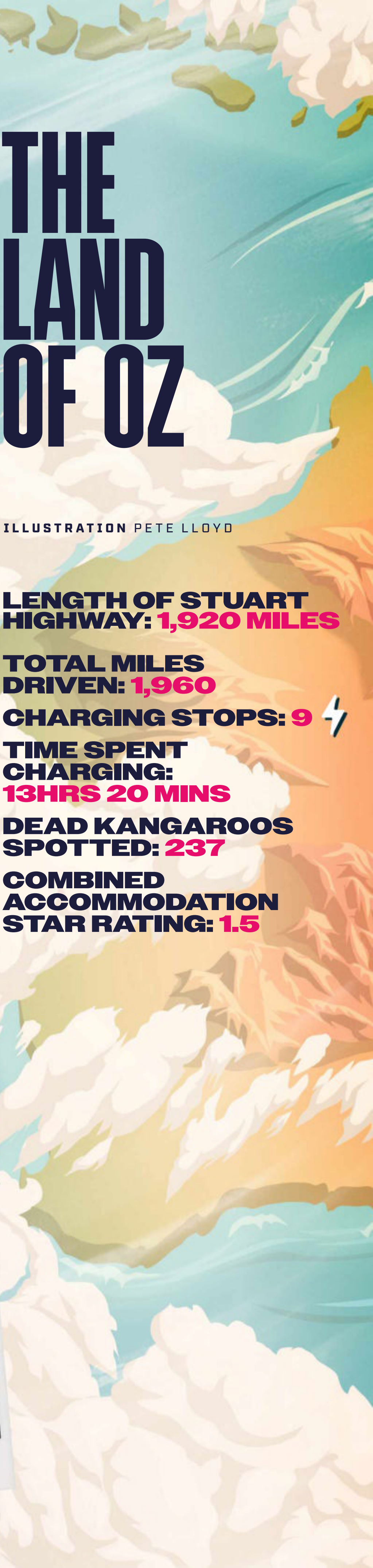
Indicated range is 300 miles. Hand-dryer temperature air sears out of the vents and I drop the cruising speed from 60 to just 35mph. Within minutes my sweat is pooling on the armrests and puddling on the seat squab. Rarely has a brand new car depreciated faster. And here the anti-EV mob will say, "Well there you are – if you're turning your internal organs into dried apricots then clearly electric cars are about as useful in the Outback as an ice hotel." My take is range anxiety is best defused by front loading it – get the stress out of the way early. After an uncomfortable hour the careful, stuffy pottering has added enough buffer to the range that I can engage the AC *and* make it to Ghan. Just.

An hour south of tonight's digs, we overtake a Tesla Model Y. There can only be one charger he's heading to. This just became a race, a test of nerve measured in 1mph cruise control increments and 0.5°C of cabin temperature. We blast over the border into the Northern Territory with main beams ablaze searching for kangaroos. My eyes flit to the mirror every other second but he doesn't give chase in my slipstream.

Relief is shortlived. Arriving (with single digit battery percentage) at Ghan – named after the Afghan settlers whose camels monopolised this route before the combustion engine took over – the charger stubbornly refuses to mate with the Kia. Up until now we've had flawless service from Chargefox, Australia's largest and most popular charging provider, but this station belongs to the National Road and Motorists Association. Except it doesn't. The NRMA helpline says the charger has been offline for weeks due to complaints and they can't remotely reboot it. The call centre lady wishes us luck and bids us a good night in the desert. It's 10pm, we're being devoured by mosquitoes and my gamble on skipping the slow charger is turning into a FUBAR.

Dean the photographer has a moment of genius and sets about cleaning the socket's innards with a lens dust blower and a trusty microfibre cloth. Clods of red dust are liberated from the nodes and after 45 minutes of stress and swearing charge is trickling into the exhausted EV3. We're about to retire to another spartan roadhouse bedsit when guess who rolls into town?

fast charger



THE LAND OF OZ

ILLUSTRATION PETE LLOYD

LENGTH OF STUART HIGHWAY: 1,920 MILES

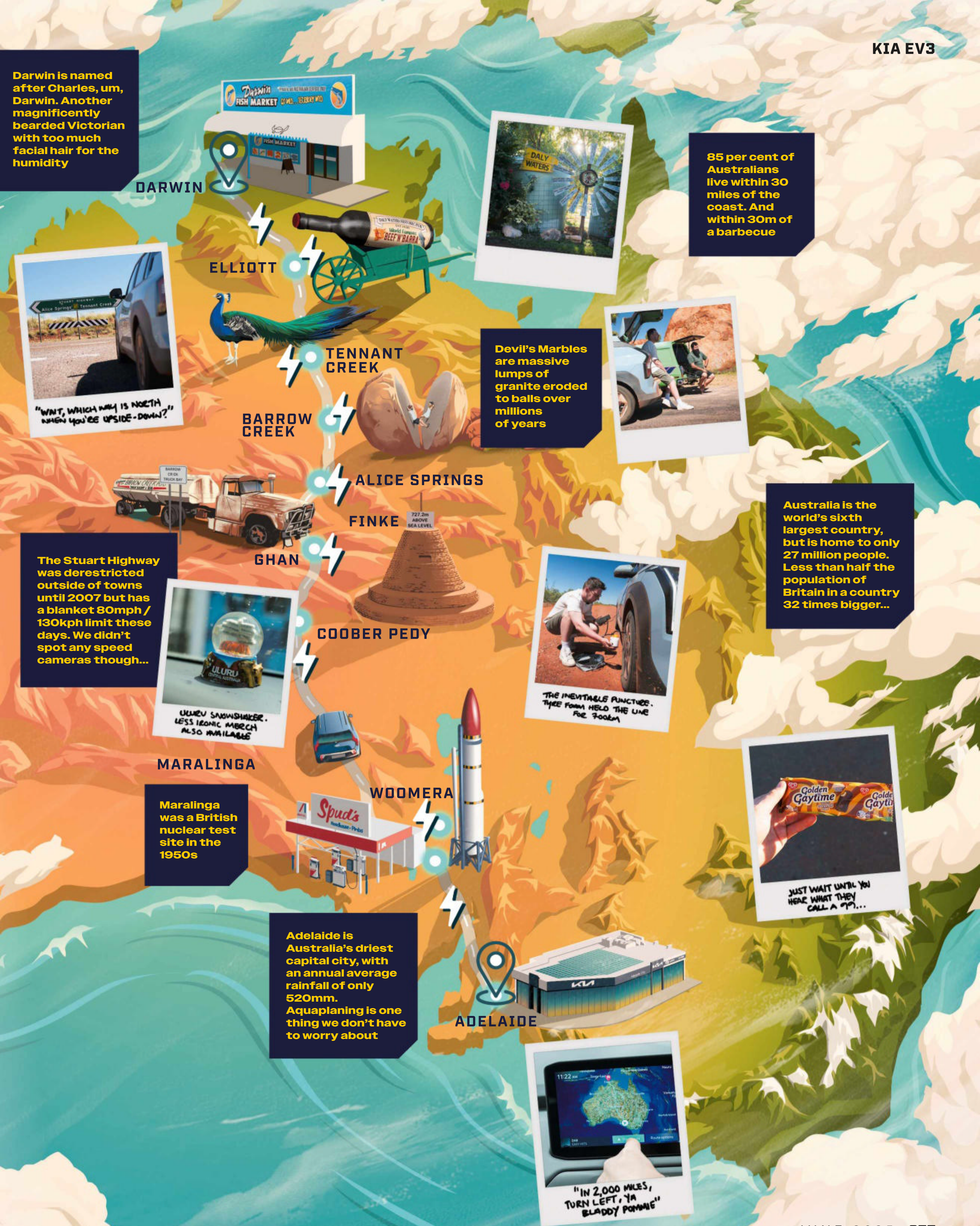
TOTAL MILES DRIVEN: 1,960

CHARGING STOPS: 9

TIME SPENT CHARGING: 13HRS 20 MINS

DEAD KANGAROOS SPOTTED: 237

COMBINED ACCOMMODATION STAR RATING: 1.5


DARWIN
Darwin Fish Market
ELLIOTT
Daly Waters
TENNANT CREEK
BARROW CREEK
Barrow Creek Truck Bay
ALICE SPRINGS
FINKE
727.2m ABOVE SEA LEVEL
GHAN
COOBER PEDY
MARALINGA
WOOMERA
Spud's
ADELAIDE

Darwin is named after Charles, um, Darwin. Another magnificently bearded Victorian with too much facial hair for the humidity

85 per cent of Australians live within 30 miles of the coast. And within 30m of a barbecue

"WAIT, WHICH WAY IS NORTH WHEN YOU'RE UPSIDE-DOWN?"

Devil's Marbles are massive lumps of granite eroded to balls over millions of years

Australia is the world's sixth largest country, but is home to only 27 million people. Less than half the population of Britain in a country 32 times bigger...

The Stuart Highway was derestricted outside of towns until 2007 but has a blanket 80mph / 130kph limit these days. We didn't spot any speed cameras though...

THE INEVITABLE PUNCTURE. TYRE FOAM HELD THE LINE FOR 700KM

ULURU SNOWSHAKER. LESS IRONIC MERCH ALSO AVAILABLE

Maralinga was a British nuclear test site in the 1950s

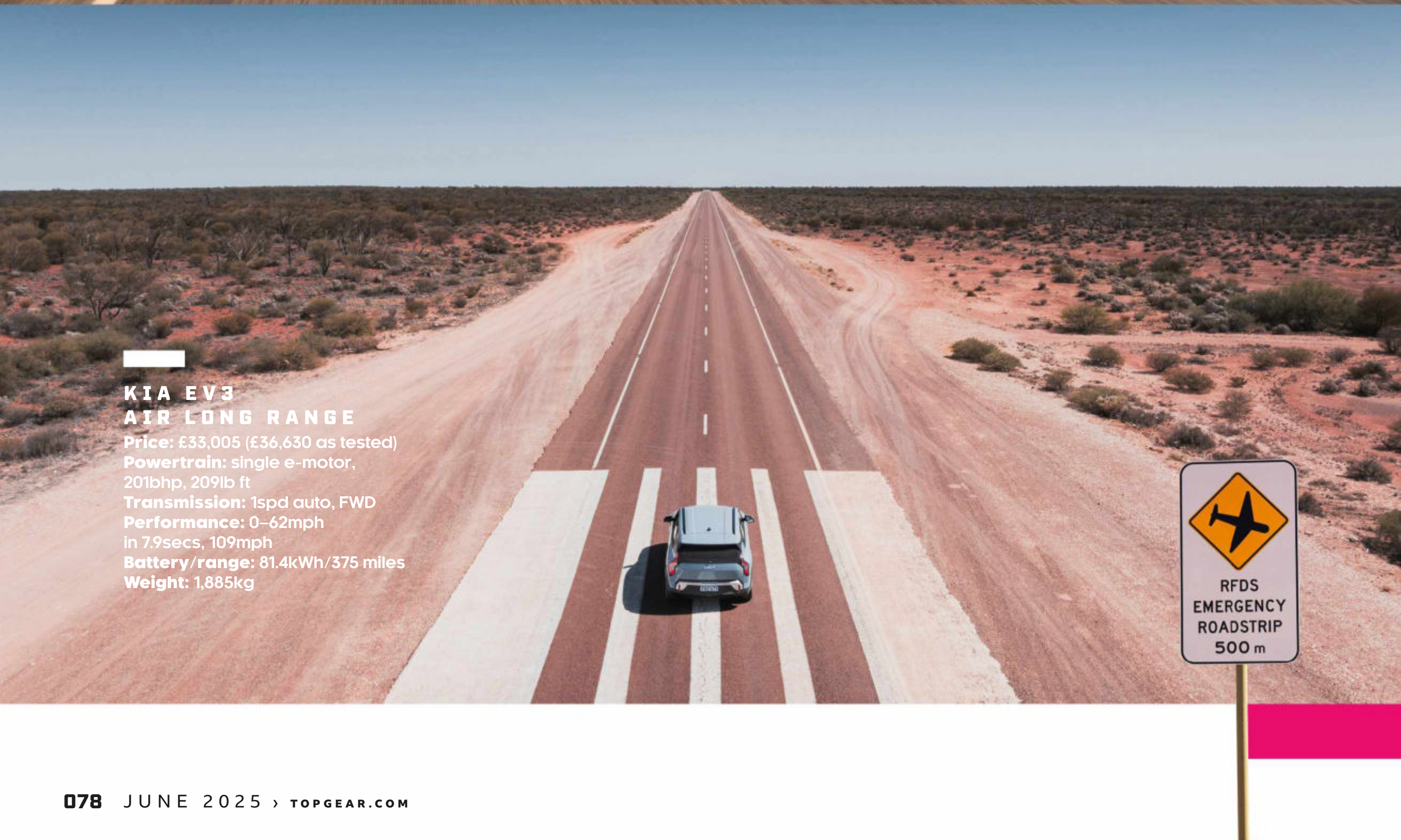
JUST WAIT UNTIL YOU HEAR WHAT THEY CALL A 99...

Adelaide is Australia's driest capital city, with an annual average rainfall of only 520mm. Aquaplaning is one thing we don't have to worry about

"IN 2,000 MILES, TURN LEFT, YA BLADDY POMMIE"

Road trains always run on time in Australia, they'll just smash any obstacles out of the way...

CENTURION
MACK
XR·47AC
FNZ·67Y
ROAD
TRAIN


RFDS
EMERGENCY
ROADSTRIP
500 m

KIA EV3 AIR LONG RANGE

Price: £33,005 (£36,630 as tested)
Powertrain: single e-motor, 201bhp, 209lb ft
Transmission: 1spd auto, FWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 7.9secs, 109mph
Battery/range: 81.4kWh/375 miles
Weight: 1,885kg

WELCOME TO
ALICE SPRINGS

Brad holding court on life, the universe and everything from the back of his Shaggin' Wagon

Question you have to ask yourself is: which way is actually up?

“THE EV3 IS STABLE ON THE FINE SILTY DUST”

Ooh, rocks. Nice to see something liven up the landscape a little bit

Josh, the Tesla owner, wants to be home in Alice Springs 120 miles north of here tonight. I explain we need an hour's charge to make it to the same destination tomorrow. Charge rage? Not here. Josh exudes 'no worries mate' vibes and spends his delay offering EV wisdom. "What you're doing, this highway, this part of 'stralia – single worst section in the country. They build chargers in direct sunlight then wonder why they bake at 46ºC." I set a dawn alarm to top up the Kia, but I'm foiled: the charger's totally bricked. Blank screens, and no amount of dusting helps. Weird. Josh didn't seem like the sabotaging type.

We have 110 miles of range and a 125 mile trek to the next stop. The EV3 once again becomes a slow moving slow cooker, arriving in Alice Springs – capital of Australia's 'red centre' – with four per cent battery and "reduced power CHARGE NOW" warnings emblazoned on its multiplex screens. The charger is NRMA again, and doesn't work until a local suggests trying to activate it with the Chargefox app. Ah, the cameraderie of EV ownership. Her Tesla looks familiar... turns out our saviour is Mrs Josh. Small world.

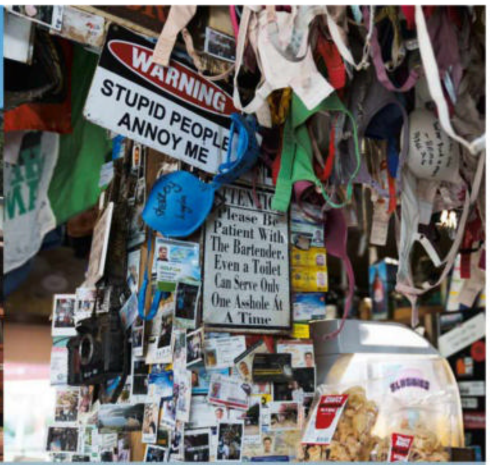
Alice Springs is a bustling metropolis in these parts. Its 25,000 residents are 10 per cent of the entire Northern Territory's population and the single biggest settlement we'll see for the next 900 miles. I'd have loved to visit the road train museum, but you know the drill. Charge, rehydrate, drive.

Up over the highest point of the Stuart Highway, 727m above sea level. Wish it was all downhill from here. This is a horribly attritional journey for an EV. Constant power drain, never coasting or regenerating, permachilling the stifling cabin. As evening sets in we detour a few miles up a dirt side road to experience what the Stuart was like before being fully sealed. The EV3 is stable on the fine, silty dust but stopping distances are none too clever, evidenced by the fact I run over the drone.

If only that was today's low ebb. We grab dinner in the village of Ti Tree but the roadhouse doesn't offer charging, meaning a final 55 mile evening stint to stay at the Barrow Creek hotel. This backwater isn't just infamous for its TripAdvisor reviews: it was the site of various bloody skirmishes between the indigenous tribes and telegraph station operators in the late 1800s, then a backpacker murder in 2001 which inspired the horror movie *Wolf Creek*. By the time we've arrived and figured out the charger (noisily powered by a clattering diesel generator in a nearby shed), Les the owner is horribly

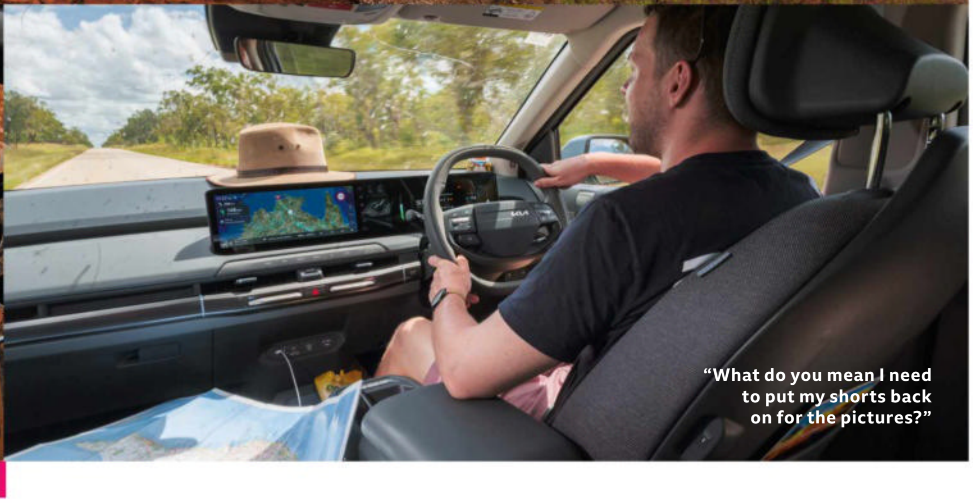
Enter
Daly Waters Pub
TIM'S JUNKYARD

A concept like 'Big Tesco' has no reference out here


WARNING
STUPID PEOPLE ANNOY ME
Please Be Patient With The Bartender, Even a Toilet Can Serve Only One Asshole At A Time

Finally, the one vehicle that would be slower to cross Australia

A1
Mataranka 76
Katherine 178
Darwin 492



"What do you mean I need to put my shorts back on for the pictures?"

drunk, but insists on a slurred, rambling tour. Cockroaches skitter across the floor. We make our unwarranted apologies and consider sleeping in the cars.

We don't 'leave' Barrow Creek. We escape. With a combined grand total of about half an hour's sleep we leg it into the bush as fast as we dare, enjoying the majesty of an Outback sunrise and trying to digest the horror of our accommodation. Framing Wikipedia articles for local murders – who does that? We don't stop running until a roadhouse 70 miles north.

Our penultimate charging stop is a slow burner in a caravan park a few hours north, so knowing that'll be dull, we treat ourselves to a stop at the Devil's Marbles rock formations. Here in the middle of nowhere, we meet Brad and his Holden 'Shaggin' Wagon', one of the infamous closed bed utes that stormed Aussie car culture in the 1970s. Loud V8s, louder graphics and shagpile waterbeds in the back. "This truck's been responsible for two divorces and at least one pregnancy," its owner grins.

I'm frankly staggered how the EV3 is taking all of this in its stride. The distance, the temperature, the relentless schedule, the impromptu off roading. No worries. No error messages or glitches. It's not overtly interesting, but as it whooshes me through this stunningly barren landscape, I find myself bonding with this deeply sensible, complete little car, willing it onwards into the arid abyss. Bug splattered, dust encrusted, somehow totally out of its depth yet completely at ease. With physical heater controls and no haptic steering wheel buttons it's less annoying than all its European rivals and better value on equipment and range. Closing in on a quarter of the average British driver's annual mileage in four days, I'd probably vouch for the reliability promised by that seven year warranty too. The Koreans have out-Golfed VW. How did that happen?

After a much more comfortable night at the fantastic Daly Waters Historic Pub roadhouse (complete with its own classic car museum – a must visit) we're truly on the homeward leg. It's 360 miles to Darwin with one more stop at Mataranka, where diggers are ripping up the car park. It looks like we're screwed, until roadhouse owner Tracey orders the workmen off for an early lunch. That's Aussie hospitality. Our ninth and final charge gives us 315 miles of range for the tropical 260 mile closing stint.

It's a much greener view out the cracked windscreen now, thick with grasses, dense woods and forests of termite mounds that tower over the Kia like Manhattan skyscrapers. The humidity climbs and a brief rain shower rinses much of the Kia's road grime away. The week before we arrived this route had been beset with record showers and flooding, but beside glowering clouds overhead there's no sign a storm will foil us at the last.

At just before 9pm local time, the EV3 rolls into Darwin's Fisherman's Wharf feeling (if not smelling) exactly as fresh as it did 1,960 miles ago. The trip tells me I've been at the wheel for a cumulative 47 hours and 57 minutes, averaging 3.8mpkWh for a real world range of 303 miles. Now, I don't doubt an internal combustion car would've arrived earlier, thanks to a higher average speed with fewer, shorter stops. I'd have avoided sweating out both kidneys. But is the purpose of a roadtrip to arrive ASAP? On this occasion, going electric bettered the adventure. Driving EVs sometimes promises a sterile future. But take it from me: if you've got the time to kill it adds a frisson of McDouall Stuart's pioneering spirit back into Outback travel.

"I FIND MYSELF BONDING WITH THIS DEEPLY SENSIBLE CAR"

Since last reset
3160.7 km
47:57
6.1 km/kWh
P
FNZ·67Y
FNZ·67Y

CHARGEY BARGEY

Can the Lotus Emeya 900 dethrone the Porsche Taycan Turbo GT as our favourite fast EV with four doors?

There's more than one way to cut a super fast electric saloon. There are two. You can follow Porsche's Taycan template, sling it low, build it lean and athletic. Or you can do a Tesla (so far as anyone wants to 'do a Tesla' right now), build it comfy, but keep the motors massive so it still does zero to vanishing point in nothing flat. Now there's a third way, which we can call the Lotus position. A four door that promises things we are used to from Norfolk (crisp dynamics, proper pace and performance), but also things we really aren't (top notch build quality and luxury that extends further than optional carpets). So, has Lotus built a car to outstrip the Taycan and claim the title of Best EV Super Saloon? Jack, why don't you kick this one off?

Jack Rix: I'll be honest, the Lotus badge had me rattled, so I thought I'd better bring along the meanest Taycan available. A car that brings proper handling and finesse alongside a dump truck of horsepower. The Turbo GT, lest we forget, has a 7:07.55 'Ring time (the record for series production EVs) to its name. It also seems to have come dressed as a zebra today, or possibly a barcode, which is hard to forgive, but it has up to 1,092bhp and does 0–62mph in 2.2secs, which helps.

Ollie Marriage: Hmmm, I'm packing 905bhp. I didn't expect to be so comprehensively outstripped. Anyway, this is the Emeya 900, it used to be the Emeya R but Lotus thought the power figure was

worth boasting about. Which, until you turned up, it was. It's got a 102kWh battery, tri-motor setup with two on the back axle and bodywork that looks like it was done by Lamborghini. Plus it's got a massive wheelbase, so plenty of space in the back. How much lounging space does yours have?

JR: Masses of lounging space, on account of there being no back seats.

OM: So what are the back doors for?

JR: Polishing your carbon fibre or pure deception. Speaking of which, how British is yours?

OM: What do you mean? It's covered in Colin Chapman's initials, it's clearly the epitome of Britishness. Built in Wuhan, a little east of Norwich. OK, OK, this Lotus is a Geely product and it doesn't feel like it's designed for a British audience. It's more global than that. The question is whether this matters. Because it still feels like a Lotus inside. Nice firm touch points, clean simple design – it's attractive in here. And well made. And the screens work. And it doesn't smell of glue. I just seem to be looking out over your roof.

JR: Yes, it does appear a little high for a Lotus. The Porsche practically sits on its belly, and you feel it straight away – it's got a very trick active suspension system that can bank the car into bends for comfort, and lift the nose when you slam the brakes, but on track I'm locked in Sport Plus mode, which just keeps things very low, firm and flat. There's noise and gearshifts missing here, but not body control and all the grunt your eyeballs can take. It's monstrously fast, but weirdly calm and capable. It's also 0.5secs faster than the 992 GT3 RS around the *TG* track with Stig at the wheel (we checked, just to be sure and it did a 1:14.3).

OM: We did a drag race, too, and the Emeya lost. Although it did soundly beat both an Audi RS7 and BMW M5. Not bad for 2,650kg. But it needs a little more Hethel tuning. Under full load the diffs pull so hard it seems to crab up the road. But I do like it, it's got responsive steering, a settled ride, good turn in, it's well behaved and can cope with the power. It's just a bit forgettable to drive. And that's the last thing a Lotus should be. Especially one costing £129,990. As ever the entry £84,990 Emeya 600 looks like the one to have.

JR: Um, my Taycan with Weissach pack (cutting a token 70kg) is £186,300. But this one has some options, like the £8,000 barcode wrap… bringing the total as tested to £199,305.

OM: Is Porsche daring people not to buy its limited edition specials or what? Don't tell me you think it's the best car in the range.

JR: No, but it's the best car here.

OM: Look, I'll concede it's the faster, better handling car here, although it's playing fast and loose with the word 'saloon'.

JR: I'd look at it from the opposite direction – don't think of it as a go faster saloon, more of a nail in the coffin of Porsche's Mission X EV hypercar idea. It's as fast as you could feasibly want to go, and you can even forego the Weissach weight saving and have seats in the back and a boot. Chalk this up as a win for the zebra.

RX25 YGT
PORSCHE

BEST EV SUPER SALOON

SEOUL TRAIN

WORDS JASON BARLOW **PHOTOGRAPHY** CHRISTIAN BITTMANN

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

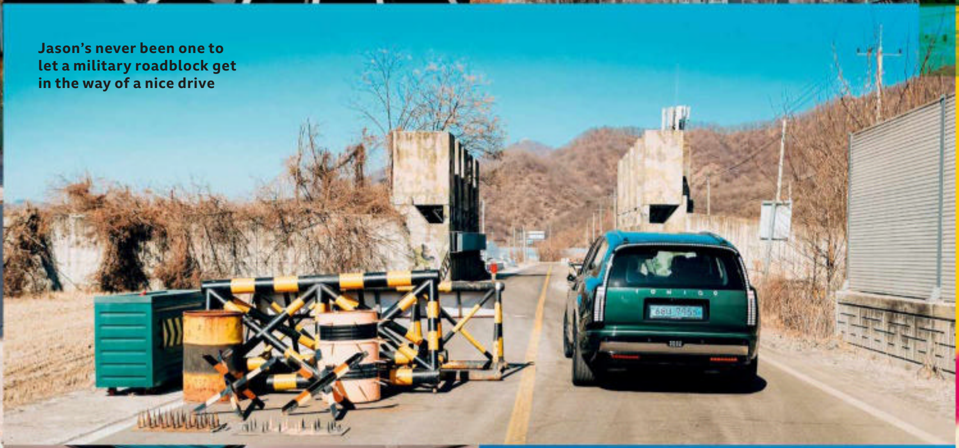
There's been a dearth of electric seven seaters on the market until recently, but thankfully the Koreans have our backs

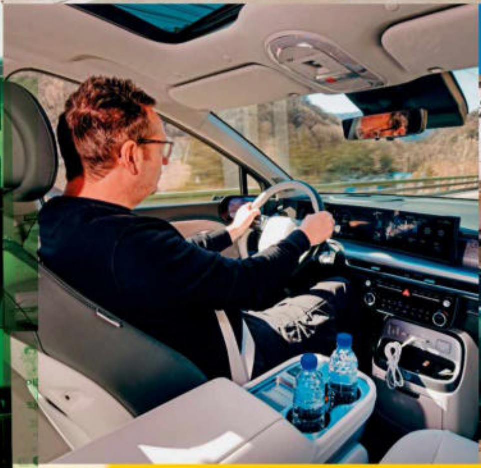
(주)와룡컴퍼니
2898

Nothing like a nice sunny afternoon and a bit of Run-DMZ on the stereo

IONIQ 9
68나 7955

This is actually an Aldi, they just love a bit of brutalist architecture round these parts


Jason's never been one to let a military roadblock get in the way of a nice drive



It's hours before he can get anyone to buy him some booze from inside the shop

Borders are strange things. Sometimes the only clue you've passed from one country to another is when your phone stops working as it hunts for a new network.

Not in South Korea. When you hit the demilitarised zone that separates it from the north, you know all about it. The DMZ spans 160 miles from coast to coast, and it's almost three miles wide. OK, so you don't hit a giant wall as you approach, or suddenly become besieged by suicide drones (yep, they're a thing), but everything feels a little... *other*. First you spot a growing number of military vehicles and personnel. Normal traffic thins out to the point that there isn't any at all. Eerie. Our all new, plus sized Hyundai Ioniq 9 – no shrinking violet, this – is now hiding in plain sight. Then you notice the so called 'tank traps', giant concrete blocks at strategic intervals on the roadside. These can be detonated to stop an invading force from progressing any further. This is what paranoia looks and feels like.

You can't blame them. South Korea has effectively been at war with its neighbour for more than 70 years, locked in a high stakes stalemate that's one of the world's more curious geopolitical conundrums. Not least because life under Kim Jong Un's regime – blue jeans are banned because they're a symbol of Western decadence – is somewhat different from the one lived in the south. Seoul has been bullied a fair bit over the years, and had to reconstruct and reimagine itself following the fighting in the 1950s. It's done so in relentlessly inventive style. The city is a dreamscape of endless gleaming steel and chrome buildings, the climax of the movie *Inception* made real. The streets in the Seongsu and Sinsadong districts fizz and pop with the intense energy only a big Asian city provides – creative, fashionable and a bit bonkers. Seoul is currently sixth on the list of the world's biggest metropolitan economies behind Paris, San Francisco, LA, Tokyo and New York. But it's ahead of London.

Hyundai is part of this, of course, one of Korea's biggest companies with tendrils that spread in myriad directions. Done with simply catching up, its automotive arm is currently bossing the discourse on car design and technology. But can the magic extend to an electric XL people carrier?

Actually, things have been reined in a bit compared to the Ioniqs 5 and 6 (and the related Kia EV9). Hyundai calls its philosophy "aerosthetic", leaning into aero efficiency without going nuts. The signature pixel lights are here – inspired by the *mieum* character in the Korean alphabet – and nicely worked radii hide the 9's inherent blockiness. That boxy form is more streamlined than it looks, though. A gently curved roofline and a tapered tail result in a drag coefficient of 0.259, important when it comes to extending an EV's range. There's also active aero, an underbody flap sending cooling air to the battery and drive system when it's needed. The Ioniq 9's windscreen, tailgate glass and interior sensors handle the connectivity and autonomous driving requirements, so there are no unsightly lidar excretions. Volvo, take note.

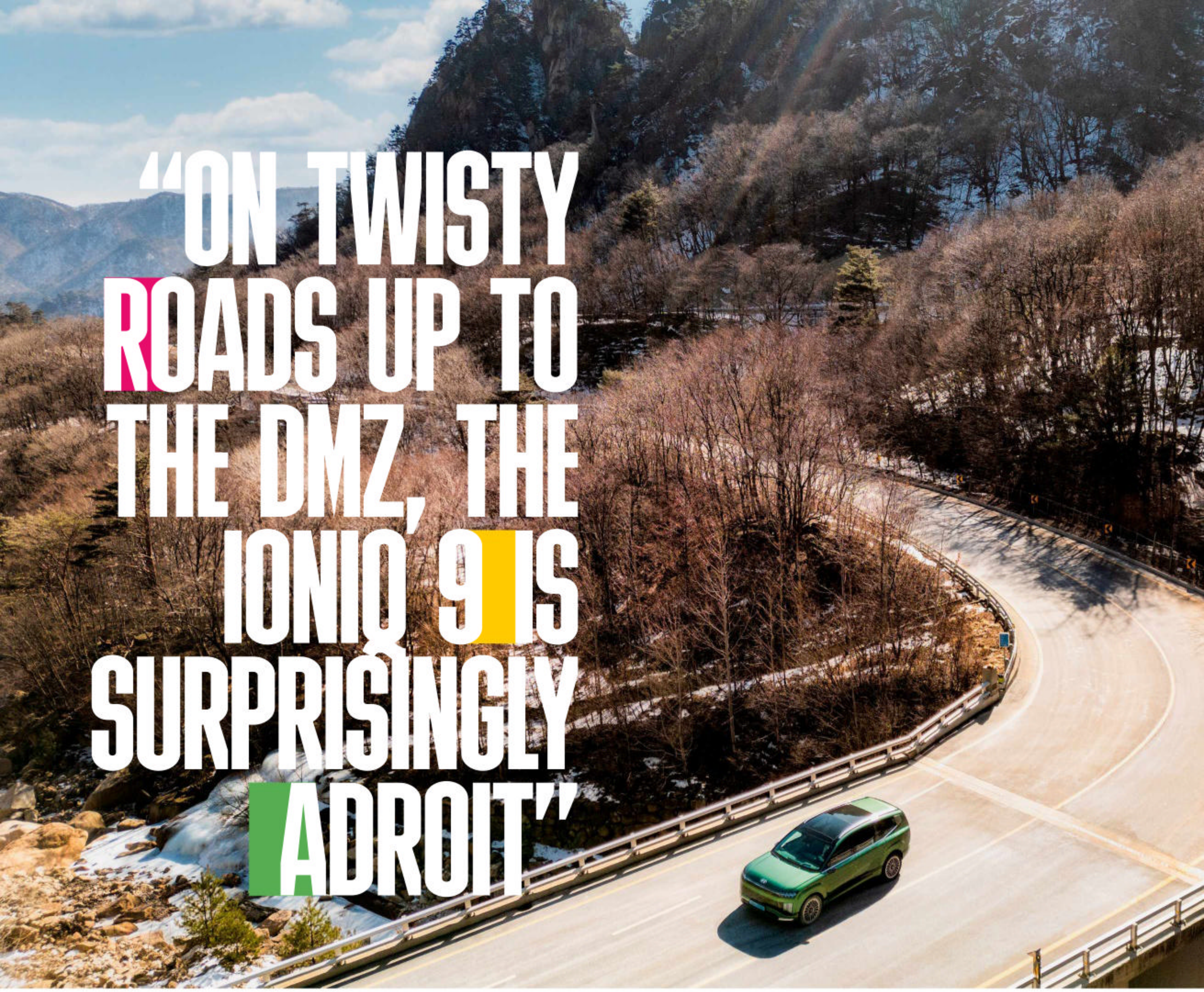
Three versions are available, each equipped with a hefty 110.3kWh lithium NCM battery, in escalating power outputs. *TG*'s is the midranking Long Range AWD, dual motor but with the power pegged back to 309bhp. Prices and specifications are still unconfirmed, but we expect this version to cost around £74k.

Seoul doesn't sprawl quite like LA but its traffic is still multiple flavours of hell. From our hotel south of the Han river, we head northeast. Despite the congestion, no one hammers their horn or drives angry. The Ioniq's powertrain is expertly judged, stepping off briskly without snapping your head back. An active sound design programme offers a bunch of different whooshy noises, but after trying them out we decide silence is golden. A shortcut button has knocked off the ADAS, so there's no bonging.

It takes 90 minutes to fully escape the city, but eventually the modernist high rises give way to countryside. Rural South Korea and Seoul, it seems, are very different entities. There's little steel or chrome out here and no sign of K-pop, but you can sense a serenity. The younger generation is invariably drawn to the city, although there are signs that this trend is actually reversing. It's called *gwinong gwichon* – the pursuit of a simpler life.

The Ioniq 9 is down with that. "During COVID there was a big 'back to nature' push," Hyundai's head of colour and trim, Diana Kloster, tells me. "We became more interested in biophilic design as a result, and wanted to create an interior environment that really destresses the occupants. We get accused of greenwashing but trust me, we really are trying. We are rigorous about the sustainable fabrics we use, and there's recycled marine waste, plastics and aluminium in this car. But it is also a premium product. You need to open the door and immediately sense the quality."

It's right up there. The commanding driving position and seats are Range Rover good. In some markets, the 'Relaxation' chairs have full massage functionality, and the middle row can be smoothly swivelled

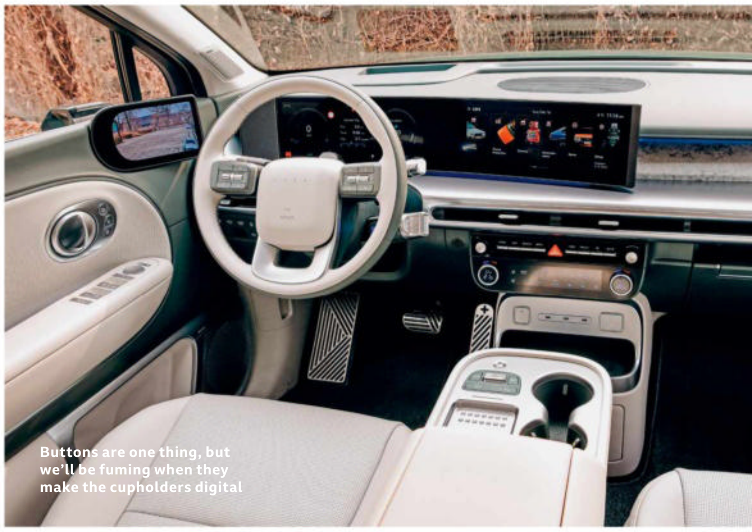


“ON TWISTY ROADS UP TO THE DMZ, THE IONIQ 9 IS SURPRISINGLY ADROIT”

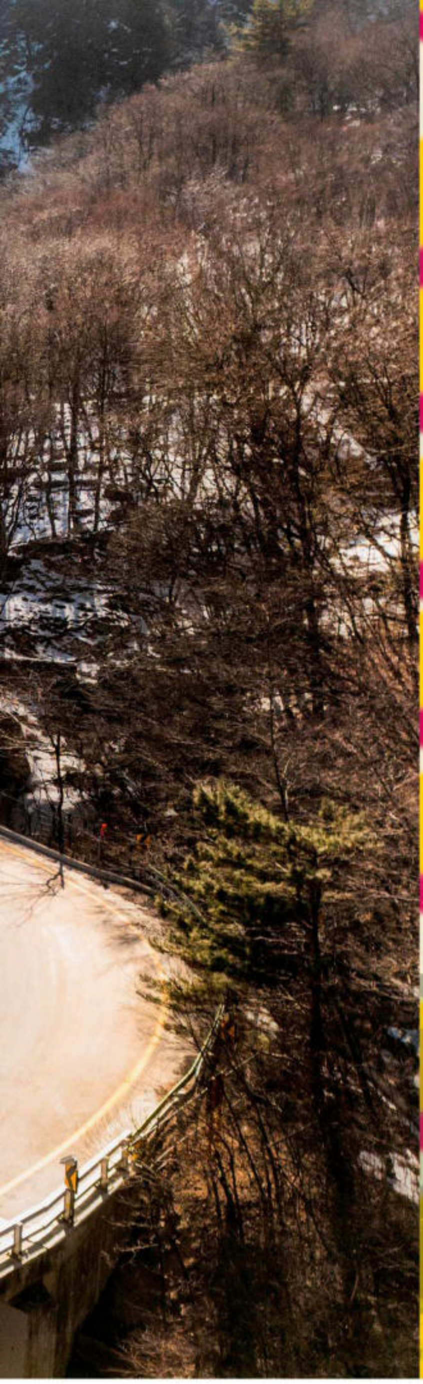
round to face the rear seats. Row two is limolike, and even row three is pretty spacious. Fold it away and there are 1,323 litres of space.

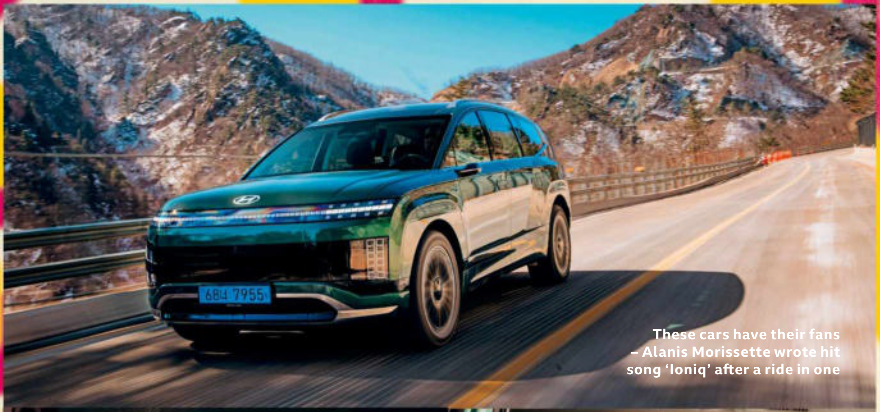
Up front, a panoramic dual screen 12.3in display dominates the semi-floating dashboard. The touchscreen is intuitive and easy to read, although the graphics are a little vanilla. The steering column is busy, drive done via a chunky controller, paddles on either side altering the level of regen braking. A tech palace on wheels it may be, but climate and audio get physical buttons. Wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard, and the steering wheel’s pixelated green dots illuminate the state of charge, as on the smaller Ioniqs. Go for the top ever so slightly chintzy Calligraphy trim and you get the upgraded 14 speaker Bose audio system. Various ‘features on demand’ are available from the online store, including video streaming.

It’s also practical. The ‘Universal Island’ is a console with bidirectional armrests that can slide up to 190mm between the first and second row of seats. There are little rubberised pixels on top of the console island that stop your phone from sliding around. It’s also cooled so it won’t fry while it charges. The HVAC uses a heat pump that

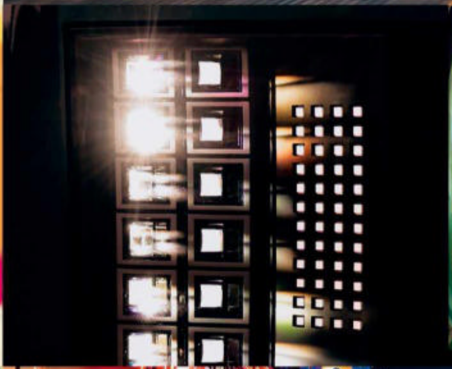


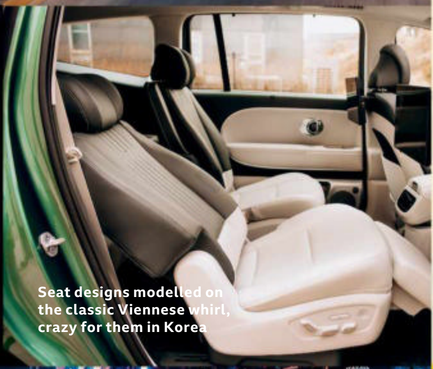
Buttons are one thing, but we’ll be fuming when they make the cupholders digital





These cars have their fans – Alanis Morissette wrote hit song 'Ioniq' after a ride in one





Seat designs modelled on the classic Viennese whirl, crazy for them in Korea

recycles waste heat to maintain an appropriate cabin temperature without draining the battery. There are six USB-C ports on all three rows that can deliver 100W of power. A steriliser cubby can sanitise phones, wallets and whatever else ends up in there. For a country that didn't endure a COVID lockdown, the Koreans are keen on cleanliness.

The Ioniq 9 uses Hyundai's E-GMP architecture, a modular platform that underpins other Hyundai and Kia EVs. A compact electric power system combines the motor, transmission and inverter into a single unit. Thanks to its 800V battery system, the Ioniq 9 charges from 10 to 80 per cent in just 24 minutes – assuming you can find a 350kW charger. Vehicle to load functionality means you can use that huge battery to charge other devices.

On the twisty roads on the run up to the DMZ, the Ioniq 9 is surprisingly adroit. It rides on a multi-link suspension at either end with twin-valve dampers, and it's polished and plush on the move. This is an upmarket play from Hyundai, but active noise cancelling tech, triple layered acoustic glass, and noise reducing, foam filled tyres take the fight to the establishment.

And it's thoroughly engineered. A Chassis Domain Control Unit delivers torque vectoring for more precision on cornering, and lateral wind stability control monitors high speed behaviour. The Ioniq 9 stays flat and stable. Auto Terrain mode uses AI to interpret the weather conditions and track the road ahead to select a suitable driving mode.

On which note, there's the usual selection – Normal, Eco, Sport and a My Drive one that allows you to personalise the setup – but as ever Normal feels like the best bet. The steering is nicely weighted without being especially interactive, and everything is in phase with everything else. The regen braking gives you the option of single pedal driving if you want it, and brake feel is pretty good. Our Long Range AWD test car can get to 62mph in 6.7 seconds and we manage 2.85 miles per kWh, although it was subzero outside most of the time. Expect to see over 300 miles in warmer conditions.

Having made a break for the border, we head back into the city, all reflections and neon. Electrification suits this big Hyundai, a soothing luxury experience in a world that's slipped its moorings. It's a worthy winner of Best Seven Seat EV.

LITTLE

Stylish, small, retrofuturistic… these are the EVs that everyone's

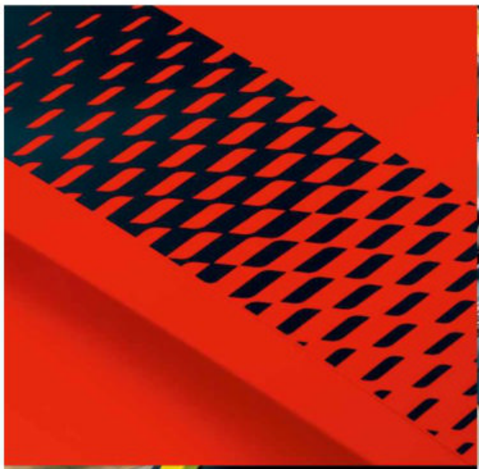
WORDS PAUL HORRELL **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025
866VM
YH25 XYV

MIX

BEST COMPACT EV

talking about. Where should you spend your hard earned cash?



Grande Panda is suitably retro – but we'd love to see the hammock seats return

19°C
11:59 am
MULTI-SENSE
SPORT
My Driving
Settings
Configure
A/C

All these badges were acceptable in the 1980s, they're even better now

The Mini's only confusing the first eight times you start it up. Fine after that

POWER
START STOP
R
N
P
D/B
MAX
REAR

Before you cry foul… yes, we know these pages are a playing field that's badly unlevel. The price of this top of the range electric Mini is half as much again as this electric Panda. It's not a normal comparison test. We're here to show how much choice there is among desirable little cars. I don't just mean in the way they look, either, but also how you interact with them and drive them. These aren't just cars, they're characters, somehow animate. In an age where the global auto biz has decided – because it thinks you have decided – that what you need is a blobby crossover with a generic twin screen interface and blasé dynamics, that's a relief.

If you really want to save money, the Grande Panda is for you. There's a cheaper trim than this one, called Red, at £20,995. It has the same power and the same 199 miles of WLTP measured range as this top spec La Prima version. The Red is the one to buy because the Grande Panda, like all Pandas through history, feels cheap because it is. It doesn't insult you with the notion that cheap is boring. The Red saves money by rolling on (perfectly attractive) white steel wheels and goes without the roof rails and heated seats, its climate control is manual and its centre screen has no built in satnav but you'll be mirroring your phone anyway.

Good design costs nothing. The sheet metal is neat and chunky. Pixel motifs for the lights are copied in the cabin vents. A homogeneous set of rectangles with semicircular ends covers off the dash, binnacle, lower console and door handle plinths. The cabin trim isn't made of expensive multilayered soft plastics, but the textures, like the shapes, make it obvious the designers thought about it, and they nudge you with endless Fiat logos carved into the plastic and fabric and very panels of the bodywork. Behind the Fiat lettering on the front hides the Panda's brilliant unique feature, a fixed spiral wound charge cable. You pull it out, plug in, then watch it twang back in afterward, saving you from the grimy inconvenience of coiling it into the boot.

The Renault feels more expensive, but it's still value. Base price is £22,995, but stepping up another £4k to the tested 5 Techno's price of £26,995, you get useful extra kit and meaningfully more electric range – 254 miles per WLTP. The 5's design leans on Renault's historical 5s, but not in particular on a single version or generation. It's a modern shape, but with a bunch of samples in the mix.

Inside, the R5 uses cloth and stitching to set an effectively chic, upmarket vibe. Its centre screen is easy to use and has intuitive Google-based navigation that arranges charge stops. But the graphics on its driver's screen are a fussily distracting series of oblique stripes. Still, the info's all there once you look past that.

The latest generation of Minis does well to move on from the slightly slavish retro of previous generations. The cabin is properly modern and interesting in its use of cloth that's given depth by graded colour weaves. The round screen is a silly idea, or at least an interesting idea that they didn't quite find a way of making best use of. This test version has a headup display, and while in most cars that's a bit superfluous, here it's all but vital.

The Mini also has the fewest switches, and leaves you fumbling in screen menus too often. That said, it's better than it first seems because some of the switches, for the lights for instance, also pull up screen shortcuts. There's a quick menu key that takes you close to, if not quite actually at, the point where you can turn off lane assist and speed buzzers. The Renault and Fiat do this more simply with their actual buttons. Renaults have more hardware switches than almost any car on sale these days, plus a copse of column stalks, and we like them for it. The Fiat has fewer, but then it has far fewer software systems for you to control. It's a wonderfully Zen car: no drive modes, no configurable displays, no paralysis of choice.

The Mini and R5 sit you low down so you feel sporty and connected. The Panda has no interest in being sporty, so you're higher, with a better view. In the back, the Mini has just two seatbelts but grownups can fit as well as they can in the Fiat, which is probably too narrow for three. The Renault is wider but squeezes your shins and feet. If you need a lot of bootspace, forget the Mini altogether.

On the move, the Fiat does nothing to dent the air of good cheer. Its gait is soft and its pace slow. You're untroubled by power understeer because there's so little power. See also torque steer. So you just throw it down the road, and mostly it maintains decorum. Steering and brakes are light but progressive, so it's easy to build up the loads smoothly. The long travel suspension lets the body move around a bit, but not in a way that deflects your course. It takes quite big hits and severe cambers without much complaint. There's little audible commotion either, so the general impression is that it's a solidly made article. If you want know why it's often more fun to drive a slow car as fast as it'll go than a fast car slowly, take a Panda down a bumpy rural road.

Look at the gaps between wheels and arches in the Fiat, and the same in the Mini. Right there is how their approaches to suspension dynamics differ. The Mini is wide, squat, unyielding. Which makes it quick witted and grippy on the smooth roads that our country conspicuously lacks. On a less pristine surface it pogoes with the undulations, and, worse, gets knocked off course if one front wheel hits a bump or dip. The steering doesn't help. Either side of the straightahead, the steering isn't quick, so it stays stable on motorways. But add lock and it suddenly dives overeagerly into the arc. If that coincides with a bump that knocks you into the apex, or you get too eager with the accelerator and bring on the torque steer, then suddenly it's all a bit of a handful. This is the Mini Cooper E with the JCW pack. Cooper SE offers more power, John Cooper Works spec

"YOU FEEL CONFIDENT IN WORKING THE RENAULT HARD"

more again. They're 184, 218 and 258bhp. Things just seem a bit overwrought with the JCW. But then, the three cylinder petrol Coopers were usually more fun than the top power fours.

The Renault sits neatly in the middle of the Fiat and Mini for performance and suspension firmness, but down a road it has a harmony and neatness of motion neither of them can match. It's tautly sprung like the Mini, but has better travel over big bumps, and is far less knocked off course when it hits a bump while busy doing something else – turning or braking or accelerating. The damping is fluid and mature. So you feel confident in working it hard, and finding its precise and slightly playful reactions to on/off accelerator inputs as a way of trimming the cornering line. It's a sophisticated car.

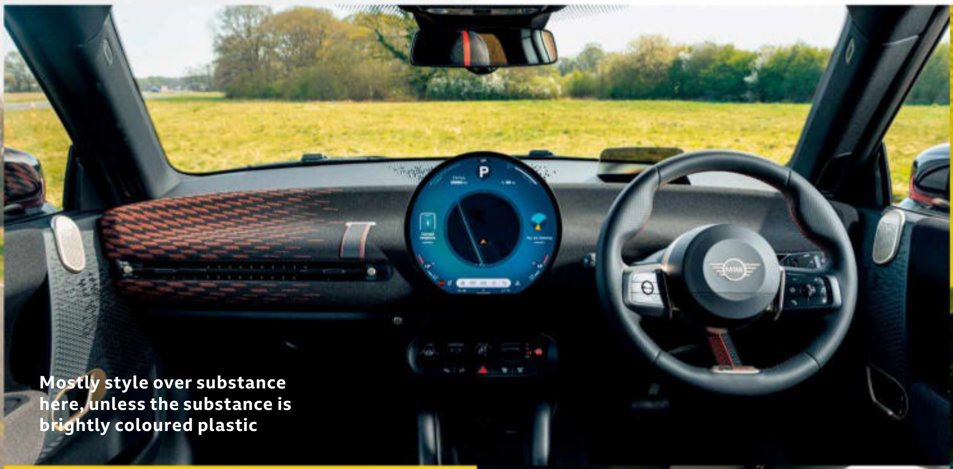
Unsurprisingly the battery capacity and performance of these three as tested rises with price. The Panda has 43.8kWh for 199 miles, taking 11.0secs to 62mph. The Renault's 52kWh are good for 254 miles and 7.9secs – it feels as much quicker as the numbers suggest, with a hit of motorway power too. Mini E is swifter than you think for a base car – 62mph takes 7.3secs. Want more pace? You have choice. All have 49.2kWh for – depending on tyre size – up to 250 miles of range.

The Mini and R5 can comfortably operate at motorway overtaking speed, making little noise. But that'll impact range. The Panda, as its power tapers away after 60mph-odd, will probably see you cruising more slowly than the other two, and getting closer to its WLTP range.

The reason we urge you to go for the cheapest Panda is that it's the clear bargain. The spec tested here is the same money and range as the cheapest small battery R5. But the R5 is a better car. Meanwhile the cheapest electric Mini is £29,420 – about the same as the R5 in this tested spec (Techno, bigger battery, more power) – but has Panda-like range.

When people complain electric cars are expensive I always say, "Yes, but that's because all cars are expensive." Match the spec and power of a petrol Corsa to the R5 here and the sticker price is the same too. The Panda is different. Choose the Red spec and it's significantly cheaper than the others, but it'll still make you happy.

The 5 is the best car here, justifying its price over the Fiat. The fact it's better than the dearer Mini is also a big win. So it's the best of these three, but we're not handing out any awards yet because there's now something else that competes in the 'Compact EV' pool – something with the R5's character, but added space. Turn the page.

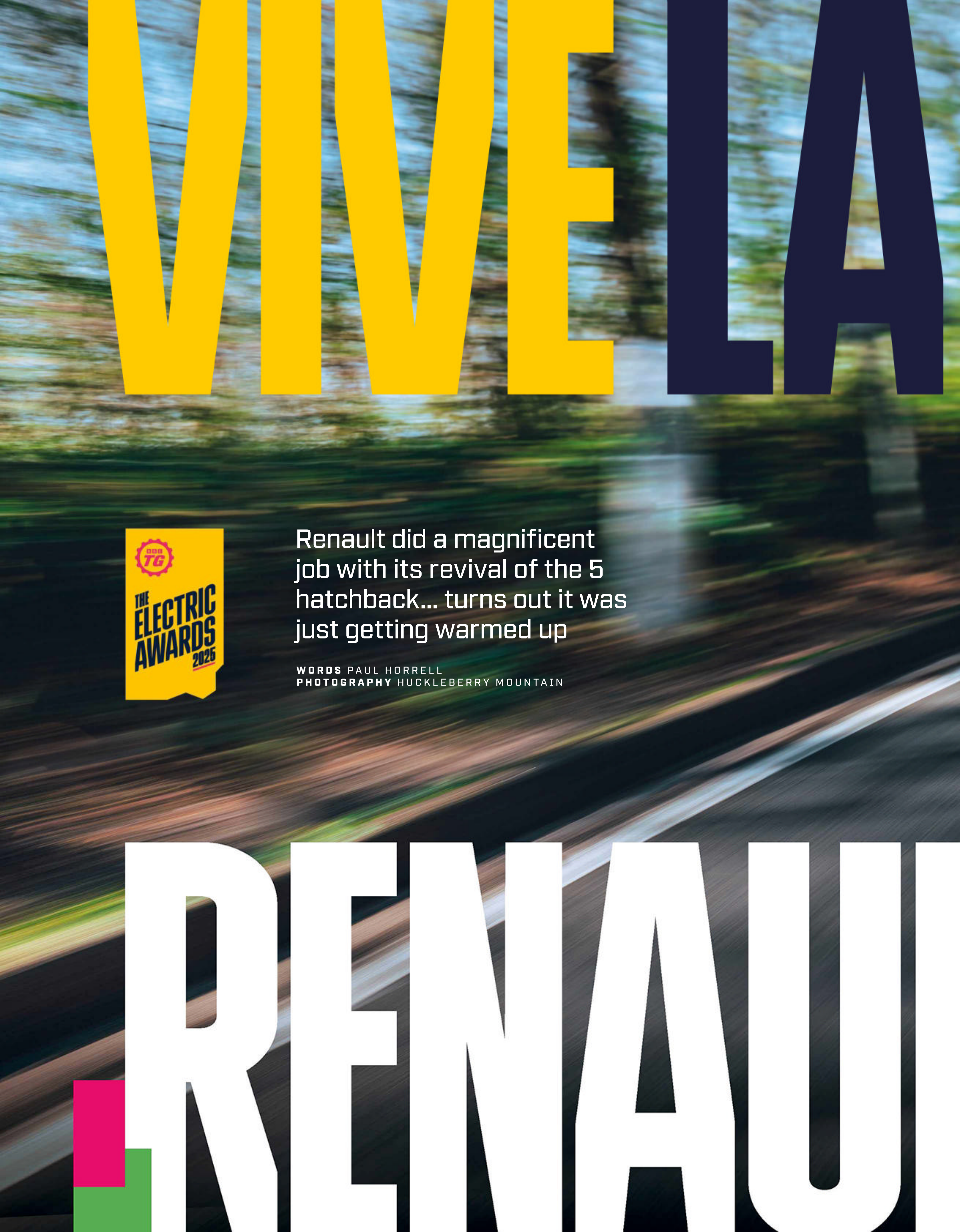


Mostly style over substance here, unless the substance is brightly coloured plastic

Neat nods to the past, thankfully the Panda has grown up a bit since

PANDA MADE WITH LOVE IN FIAT

The Renault is brilliant up here, up here, but for the vertically challenged only in the back



VIVE LA RENAU

THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025

Renault did a magnificent job with its revival of the 5 hatchback… turns out it was just getting warmed up

WORDS PAUL HORRELL
PHOTOGRAPHY HUCKLEBERRY MOUNTAIN

UTION!

Dateline Morocco, sometime in the mid 1990s. A white Renault 4 is ascending the 2,200m Tizi n'Tichka pass over the Atlas, gateway to the Sahara. I'm taking liberties with the primitive engine and brakes, using short straights between the hairpins for sneaky overtakes of all the other white Renault 4s. "It's like being on a car launch," says my passenger, who knows the things we young and stupid road testers got up to when let loose in a fleet of identical new cars. But these aren't new. They're bashed up renters. For many years, the white Renault 4 was the standard issue cheap hire car in Marrakech.

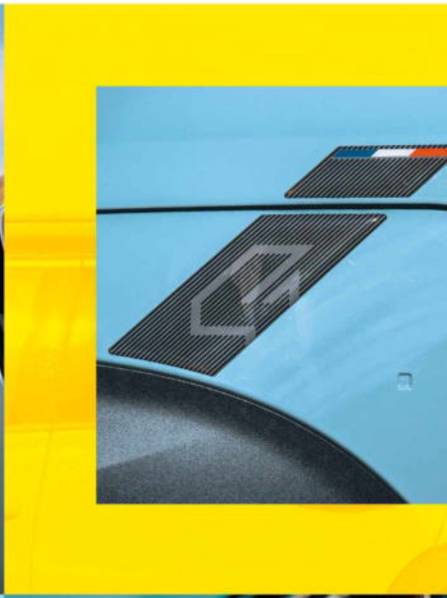
For decades that original R4, launched in 1961, did faithful service on many other thankless tasks in French-influenced parts of the world. It was cheap, versatile – the world's first hatchback – simple, tough and utterly unpretentious. Renault sold a staggering 8.1 million. Yet most us have forgotten how successful the 4 was, doubtless because they've mostly decomposed now, much like our memory of them. So the new one has to stand on its own four wheels, rather than bask in reflected glory.

Especially as in spirit this new 4 isn't a 4 at all. Not because it *is* electric, but because it *isn't* especially cheap. If you want a modern Renault 4, a car designed with a gimlet eye to every conceivable means of saving a centime, Renault will soon have one. The electric Twingo.

That first 4 was a crossover decades before crossovers became a thing. If you want to find a survivor these days, go find an apparently deserted French farm at the top of a rough steep track. So Renault is being eminently sensible in selling the new 4 that way. As a crossover for the small family, it's nicely sized, with an extra 80mm in the wheelbase versus the new 5.

So, provided the driver raises their seat a little, there's enough room for the extremities (toes, kneecaps, scalps) of an adult behind them. The boot is a deep 420 litres and the front passenger seat folds forward to

This palatial luxury would be unrecognisable to an original R4 owner



take your DIY planks or cello. A section of the bumper lifts with the tailgate, deepening the aperture. It'll even tow a 750kg trailer. The R4 is just 1.8m across the body, and feels handy down narrow streets and lanes.

It hardly takes an automotive Inspector Clouseau to figure out this car is a close relative of today's R5. Indeed pretty well everything under the bodywork is the same, except for the longer wheelbase, 50kg of extra weight – still very light for an EV this size – and slightly recalibrated springs and steering. So that brings a 148bhp motor and 52kWh battery in all UK specs. Renault's excellent screen and control system is here, with its satisfyingly abundant physical controls.

On the outside through, it's wholly other. It repeatedly riffs off the OG 1961 ancestor. For those keeping score… The face was once a single chromed frame with the round lamps at the end and grille in the middle, now the chrome is substituted by an LED perimeter track. A cut line between this and the wings follows a gap between the original's wings and forward opening bonnet/grille assembly. On the sides, tall and flattish, you've ridged door panels, like the R4 GTL had. The reverse raked rear door window and trapezoid rearmost side window keep the faith with the characteristic rhythm of the old car's fenestration. An upright tailgate and tall narrow little lamp clusters complete the picture.

Settled into the well bolstered seat, I'm reminded that in all the electric Renaults you need to drive with fingertips and toes. The steering is light at low speed, and the brake pedal gets a lot of action for just a gentle initial caress.

I soon reconfigure the drive modes to soften the initial accelerator response, because the example we're in leans into the crossover business and runs optional Goodyear all season tyres. Maybe it's because they're still brand new and waxy, but on the dusty dry roads around Paris they don't have a heap of traction. The inside front one easily spins out of tight corners.

It's a small thing compared with the positives. Although the suspension's springing is a little softer and calmer than the 5's, the steering is quickish and accurate, working in harmony with the suspension to feed you smoothly into and through the bend. At first blush the steering feels remote, but push the cornering effort harder and sensory messages start to come up from the tyres. Messages of the sophisticated multi-link rear suspension keeping everything nicely precise and balanced front to rear. It serves you with a smile.

Not unexpectedly, that all translates into a fairly busy ride. But it's not harsh, and shrugs off biggish bumps and dips without concern.

TG
BEST COMPACT EV
HC-313-PY

"IT FEELS HANDY DOWN NARROW STREETS"

R5 comes with a baguette holder, here you can fit the whole bakery

The tyres and suspension are also quiet, which helps you ignore the road level perturbations. And bumps don't knock you off line.

Power is more than enough for suburbs and B-roads, but it tails away at autoroute speed. My day in countryside and villages, not trying to be gentle but without autoroute stretches, yielded the equivalent of 215 miles. The WLTP range is 248. That's perfectly OK for a car this price.

The 4 will be between £27,000–£32,000 in the UK, all versions coming with a 52kWh battery, 148bhp, heat pump, the big central screen and 18in alloys. When Omoda, Leapmotor, GWM Ora, Haval and the like are crowding in with their drastic structural Chinese cost advantages, Renault is able to pay factory workers in France by deploying its own not so secret weapon: heritage, thumbing its history book of much loved old designs, the 4 and 5 and Twingo.

Some critics say this means Renault designers are showing a failure of imagination, as if they're merely copy/pasting old designs onto new bones. But point one, why not do it, as it's a heritage those new rivals would kill for? And point two, it's actually very hard to make these designs look credibly modern as well as spiritually old.

In 1961, the R4 was compared to a pair of jeans because it was a super practical universal, and no one judged you for it. Ideal for the fluid social climate of its first decade. This mid spec R4 has quasi-denim upholstery.

> “IT REPEATEDLY RIFFS OFF THE OG 1961 ANCESTOR”

I just found an old photo of Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg, he in jeans and unbuttoned denim shirt, she in cutoffs, gambolling in the golden French sunlight. But we're in the age of artfully distressed, strategically holed £500 designer denims, so that metaphor fails.

Anyway all this classic car stuff needn't matter if you don't care about car design history or cultural resonance. The new Renault 4 is a smart little modern car in itself, recognisably different from the waves of generic looking stuff washing up in dealers all over the country. In the EV age, design matters more and more.

Renault's masterstroke is to build not just one small EV but a pair of them that are great cars, going way beyond relying on their design alone. The R5 is already our Car of the Year but the R4 pips it - to both Best Compact EV and the big one... our overall Electric Car of the Year - because it's got the R5's charm but space to go with it. Come for the looks... stay for the value, easy ownership, smart tech and genuinely happy drive.

BBC TG
THE ELECTRIC AWARDS 2025
HC-313-PY 92

RENAULT 4
Price: £26,995 (£28,995 as tested)
Powertrain: e-motor, 150bhp, 180lb ft
Transmission: 1spd auto, FWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 8.5secs, 93mph
Battery/range: 52kWh/ 250 miles
Weight: 1,440kg (approx)

ELECTRIC CAR OF THE YEAR

RENAULT 4

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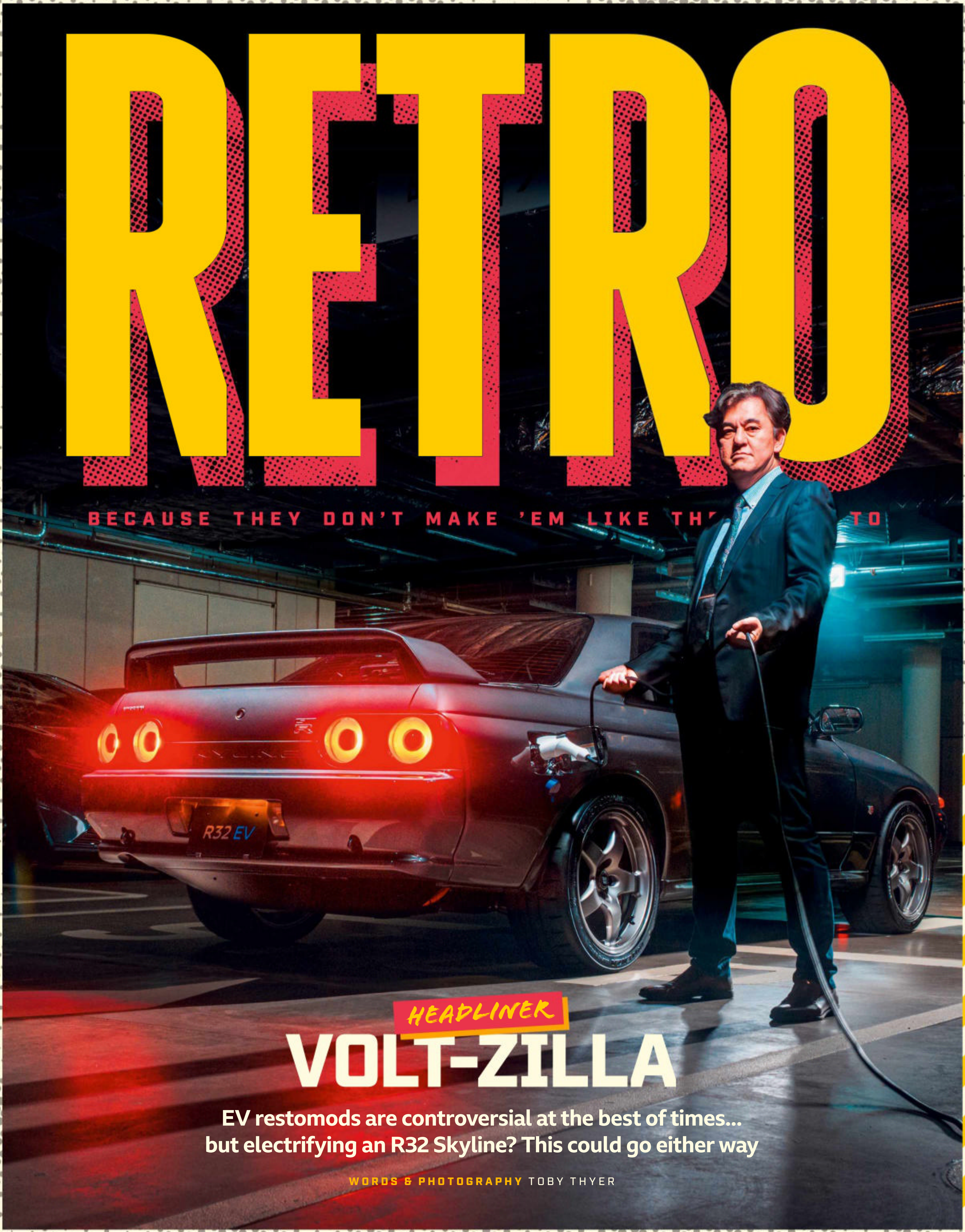
RETRO

BECAUSE THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE TH TO



HEADLINER

VOLT-ZILLA

EV restomods are controversial at the best of times... but electrifying an R32 Skyline? This could go either way

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY TOBY THYER

There's something lurking in the basement of Nissan's global HQ, and it's likely to ruffle a few feathers. Like Bowie, this legend is evolving into something otherworldly, transcending time, space and preconceptions about lightning bolts painted proudly across your face. Deep underground, Godzilla has had a heart transplant and is waiting for the doctor's all clear before being let loose on the streets of Tokyo.

This is the passion project of Mr Ryozo Hiraku, an engineer at Nissan and GT-R owner. He and his small team have designed and built this electric Skyline entirely in their spare time and with a very limited budget. Luckily, Nissan just so happened to have a mint condition R32 lying around, finished in the ineffably cool gunmetal grey. The rest of the conversion is all parts bin donations too – there's a 92kWh battery from the Leaf Nismo RC and two of Nissan's e-Powertrain electric motors. Lifting the bonnet to find a squiggle of wires, inverters and a distinct lack of anything turbo shaped immediately conjures comparisons to Doc's DeLorean.

In period, the R32 had a claimed output of 276bhp under the gentlemen's agreement, although we now know that was probably underselling the car's true power output, and indeed potential. How does this R32 EV stack up? The combined front and rear drive motors make 429bhp, and 251lb ft of torque each, which is enough to give the car a similar power to weight ratio considering the disadvantage of having a small polar bear's worth of batteries on the back seats – 367kg to be precise.

We're yet to drive it, but you know the drill – not only is the power and torque immense, but the electric motors slap it on immediately. Even the most efficient e-assisted turbo can't compete with that. It's important to note that the goal here wasn't to create a 1,000bhp electric straight line monster, but to equal the baseline performance of the original car… accounting for the extra weight.

In an ideal world, we'd all be swimming in eco friendly carbon neutral synthetic fuels in order to keep the ICE party going until our sun fizzles out. Realistically though, the future is more

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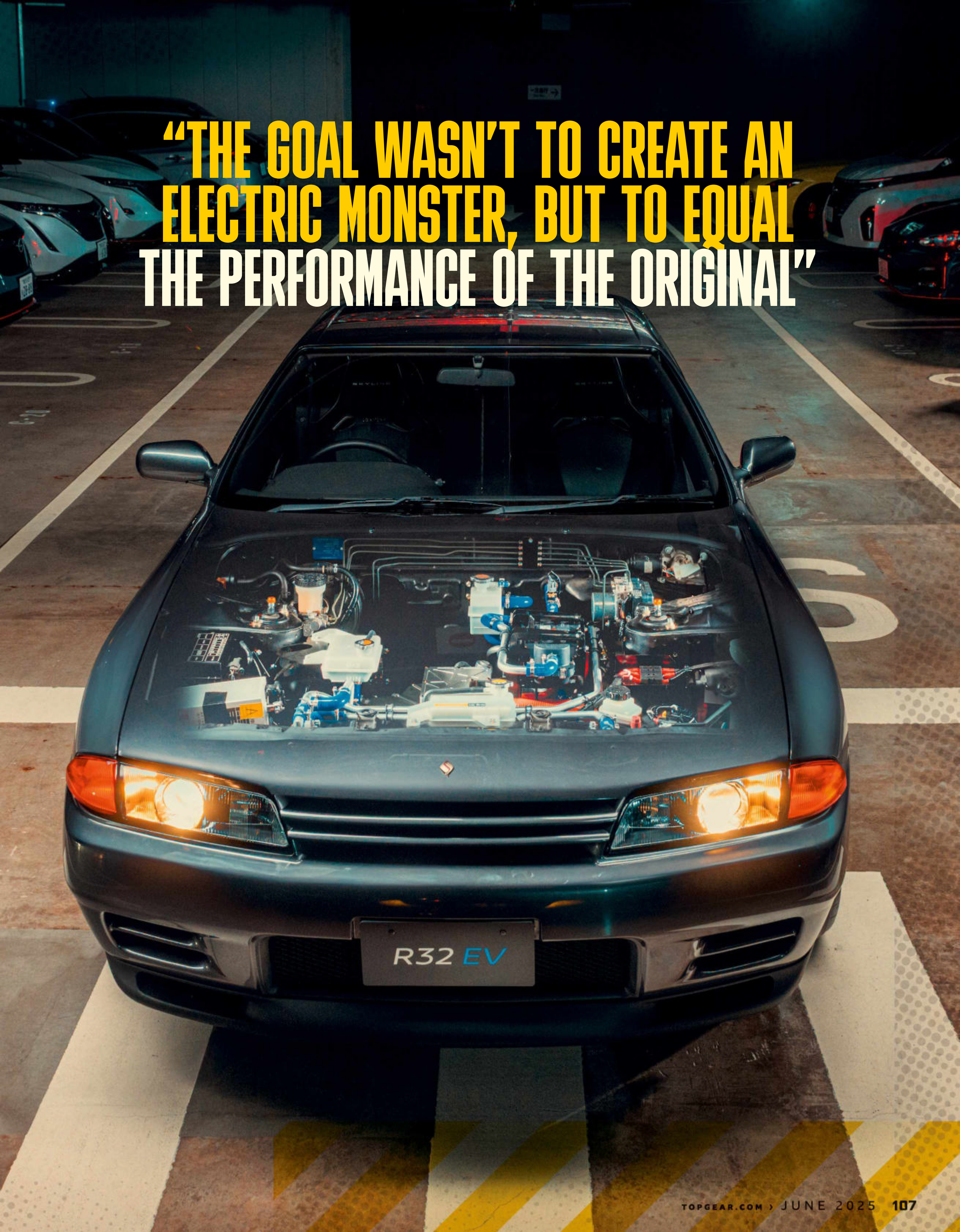
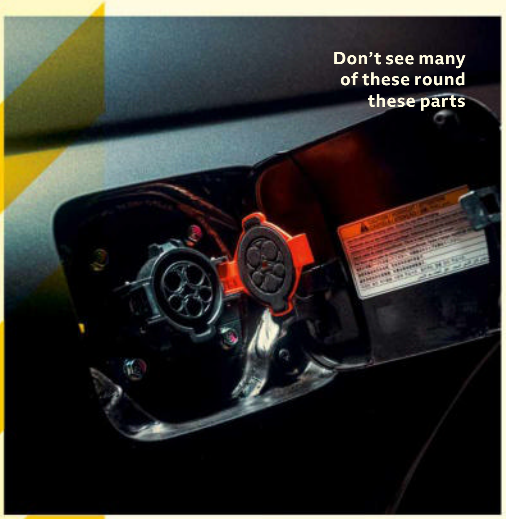
FRONT TORQUE

“THE GOAL WASN’T TO CREATE AN ELECTRIC MONSTER, BUT TO EQUAL THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ORIGINAL”

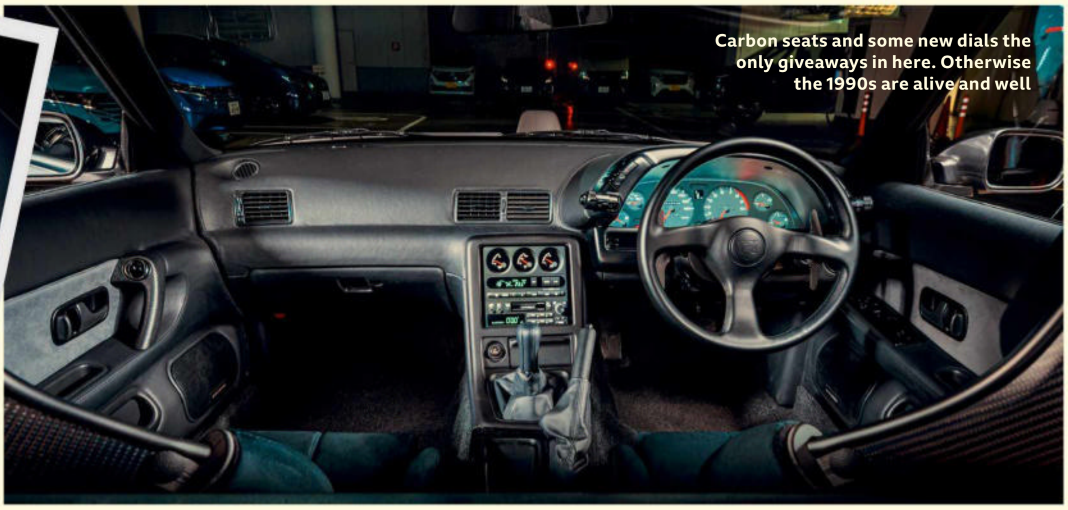


NISSAN TEST DRIVE
R32 EV
STOP

> “THERE ARE QUITE A FEW TASTY NEW PARTS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE ESPECIALLY FOR THIS PROJECT”



Don’t see many of these round these parts



Carbon seats and some new dials the only giveaways in here. Otherwise the 1990s are alive and well

uncertain than that, and electric has a central role to play in a renewable future – for mass produced cars at least.

What Hiraku-san is trying to do is safeguard against the loss of engaging driving machines, here essentially distilling the handling and spirit of the original GT-R and storing it in a battery cell for future generations to enjoy. He’s not trying to create a new R32, more to recreate it in digital form. He calls it a “digital remaster”.

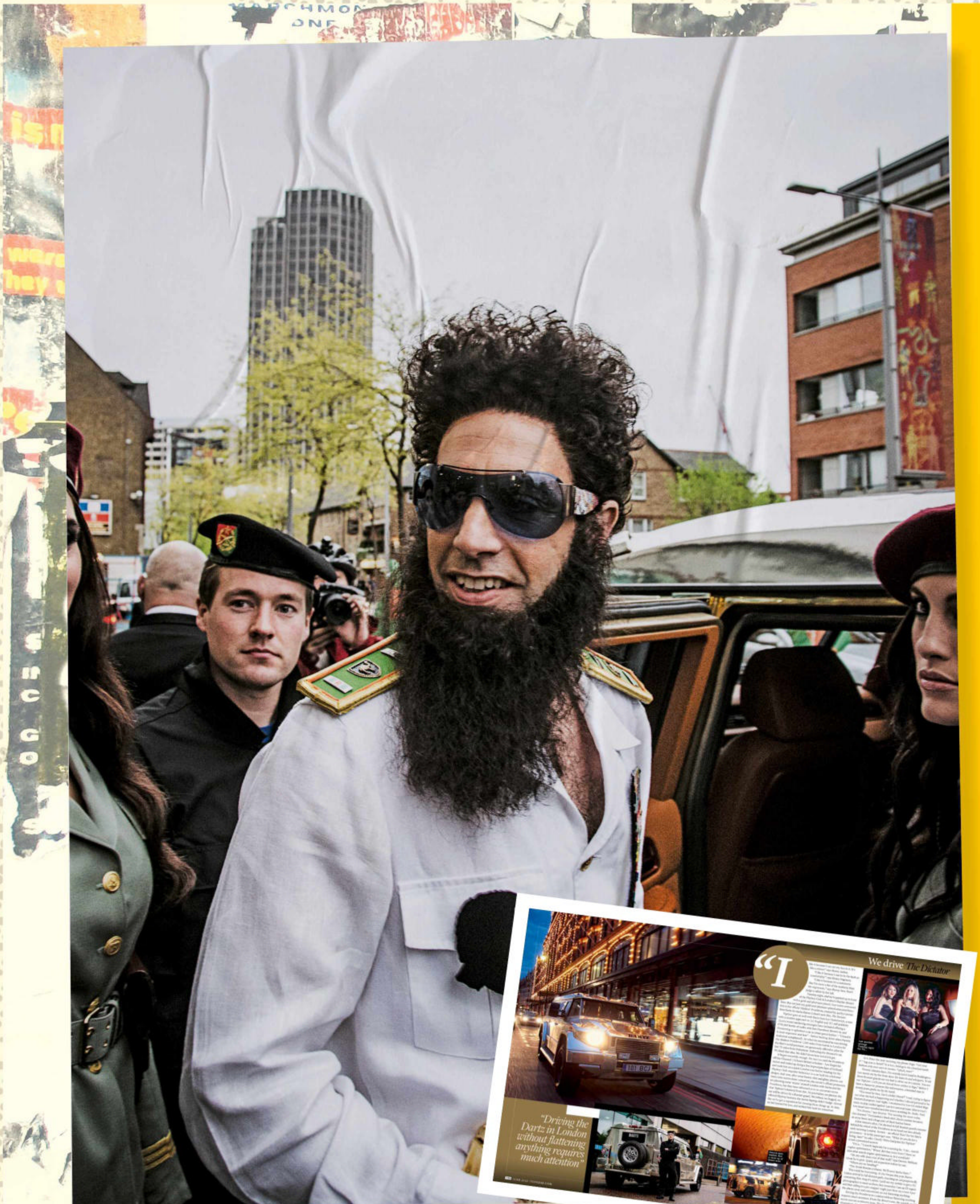
Basically you lose the dirty, noisy, polluting dinosaur juice drinking lump that is the RB26 engine and replace it with nice clean electricity while – and this is crucial – retaining the excitement and experience of the original car. Many, including myself, would argue that you can’t have one without the other, the analogue sensory overload is what makes pushing these cars hard so appealing. The team has tried to address this, kind of, with a speaker mounted behind the driver’s seat pumping synthesised rev matched engine noise into the cabin. There’s even talk of adding vibrations into the touchpoints too.

Then there’s that hefty stack of cells in the back seat, how do you make them less noticeable while chucking the car around a local B-road? The chassis is all standard R32 fare, but the stock double wishbone setup has been tuned to cope with the extra weight, with upgraded Öhlins shocks from the Nismo parts bin. Brakes are Nismo’s off the shelf R35 six pot conversion kit, which is handy because this weighs roughly the same as an R35.

There are quite a few tasty new parts that have been produced especially for this project too, which has got GT-R fans salivating. The carbon fibre full bucket seats made by Recaro, the digital readouts on the dash and centre console, and best of all the 18-inch wheels, direct copies upscaled from the OG 16-inch R32 items. Hiroku-san has even got some period correct RE-71RS Potenzas recreated in 18-inch form. Well played.

While the car is basically finished in physical form, it had its shakedown last year on Nissan’s test track and the team is a long way off having it drive and handle like the original. The Recaros, dials and reupholstered interior are classy additions though, making this the best looking test mule ever made. A Bowie-esque lightning bolt livery might be a bit much, but I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want to see it.

Will Hiraku-san and his team succeed in bottling the essence of Godzilla? Will this study result in a small, fun to drive EV sports car that handles like a 1990’s GTR? Will the next gen R36 GT-R go electric and have some of this DNA programmed into its bones? Your guess is as good as mine, but whatever happens, it’s a positive step in connecting the GT-R’s glorious past to its electrifying future.



We drive *The Dictator*

"I

"Driving the Dartz in London without flattening anything requires much attention"

IMAGES: ALAMY

The big picture

WE DRIVE 'THE DICTATOR'

"The Dictator is hustled in. The paparazzi, crowds and security melt away. I am left alone, a journalist pretending to be an IT worker pretending to be a Russian guard in a £750k bombproof truck. I place my *TG* business card on the driver's seat, hop out and find a tube home. Odd day." So concludes Sam Philip after a day spent mostly waiting for, then shuttling around Sacha Baron Cohen in full dictator garb during the promo for his 2012 film. That's Sam, in the wonky beret wondering how his life led him to this point.

WORDS: JACK RIX PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN WYCHERLEY

REMEMBERING
RETRO GAMING
THE CLASSICS

#67

Rogue Trip: Vacation 2012

PLAYSTATION, 1998

If you're looking at this PlayStation-exclusive arena-based vehicular combat game and wondering why the title above doesn't have the words 'Twisted' and 'Metal' in there, then you've got a good eye. After a messy contract dispute with Sony, *Twisted Metal* developer Singletrac left to create this spiritual sequel. And the spirit in question appears to have been an unlicensed blend of moonshine, gunpowder and gasoline.

Set in a post-apocalyptic 2012, *Rogue Trip* turned a series of US locations into warzones as you tore around the place unloading a barrage of explosives at your opponents. Predictably, it played a lot like *Twisted Metal*, only with tighter, less drifty handling which made it easier to draw a bead on a rival car.

As you'd expect, there was a colourful collection of heavily armed vehicles to choose from. The loose connective tissue was a satire of Americana, whether that's a Sunday school bus driven by a scantily clad nun, an alligator wrestler in a modified airboat or a 1967 Chevrolet Bel Air piloted by an overweight Elvis impersonator. The pièce de résistance was a hotdog themed Weinermobile inspired car called Meat Wagon, driven by a character called Dick Biggs, whose special ability was smashing opponents flat with a gigantic fibreglass sausage. Had he not died some 59 years before the release of this game, Freud would have had an absolute field day.

And if you're still wondering about the slightly confusing vacation theming, it's because the *Rogue Trip* added a unique wrinkle to the gameplay to keep you occupied. In every map there was a tourist who, once collected in your vehicle, could be ferried between photo opportunities to earn you extra cash, but made you the prime target. This is less *Crazy Taxi* and more Certifiably Insane Taxi. **MIKE CHANNELL**

OZONE HAS TOURIST!
$5500
131
SPECIAL
INSERT COIN
INSERT COIN

IMAGES: GETTY

DO/~~DON'T~~ MEET YOUR HEROES

VW GOLF GTI MKV

(2008)

£6,000 (£20,671 when new)

2.0T 4cyl	197 bhp	7.2 secs	35 mpg	1,328 kg

HERO Wilful engine, intuitive design, driving dynamics

ZERO Economy isn't great, ride quite firm, feels dated now

THE ORIGIN STORY OF THE HOT HATCH IS cloudy, but VW cut through the murk back in 1975. Has any car ever defined its class better than the MkI Golf GTI? Fifty years on, we're still copying the same template: front drive, useful cabin, lumpy engine, cool without trying too hard.

Odd then, that VW lost its way after only a couple of goes. The MkIII was podgy, plain and underpowered. The MkIV was worse. But then, in 2005, came the MkV. It was *TG*'s Car of the Year, it identified the essence of what made the MkI and MkII great, and nailed the modern interpretation.

Twenty years ago, I saw one at the VW factory in Wolfsburg. As a kid, I was captivated. It had just launched, and I could feel the aura – I could sense it was more special than other VWs.

The MkV GTI made such an impression on me that day that I bought one. Well, sort of. I asked my dad to buy me a 1:43 scale model in the Autostadt shop. To this day, that silver replica is one of my favourite possessions. It reminds me of my heritage and personal connection to VW.

Visiting my great uncle, who lived in the city and worked for VW from 1960 to 1990, was always memorable. He initially worked in the painting booth, then on the production line inspecting the original Beetle and Golf. The stories he'd recount during our visits were funny, and had special resonance to me as a car mad kid.

But the MkV GTI memory has the most significance, it was the springboard for my interest in cars. So, when this opportunity came along, I couldn't resist… would the MkV Golf GTI live up to expectations years afterwards?

Long story short: yes, it does. How it combines both essential elements, Golf hatchback with GTI hot hatch, is so brilliant. The 2.0-litre 197bhp turbocharged four cylinder is easy and uneventful under 3,000rpm, but above that, it's like you've flicked a switch from low to high speed on a food blender. The engine goes from purr to growl, 0–62mph is chomped in 7.2secs and you suddenly realise there's way more depth to this GTI than you expected.

It's rewarding and addictive in equal measure, especially when cornering. It's eager and willing, there's a bit of body roll, but it carries speed lightly and easily. The supple setup gives you the confidence to push harder, you can feel what's happening through the steering, which enables you to thread the MkV GTI through corners, positioning it *exactly* where you want.

WORDS: CALLUM ALEXANDER **PHOTOS:** JONNY FLEETWOOD

“YOU CAN DIAL IT UP WHEN THE MOOD TAKES YOU”

Mild mannered or manic depending on who’s the passenger

But I’d been won over before I even started driving. The MkV picked up those classic GTI touches that had been there at the start, but subsequently abandoned for no good reason: the tartan trim, the telephone dial alloys, the red strip around the grille and the golfball gearknob. It shouldn’t feel so right sitting in the palm of my hand, but it does. And when you sling it around the gate... well, you never miss a shift.

Above all it’s analogue and engaging, you just get absorbed in it, driving without distraction. You can dial it up when the mood takes you, so it becomes the focused hot hatch that wants to play. Yet, when the fun stops, you can open the doors, throw kids and clobber in, and no one’s any the wiser.

I love the way it looks too. Discreet enough to blend in, distinct enough to stand out. Most hot hatches are conspicuous by design, but the MkV GTI has stayed true to its roots, never ostentatious, just a few hints here and there.

I drove it for a week and felt very comfortable and at home in it. That time together made me realise it’s all the car you really need. When I gawped at it in Wolfsburg all those years ago I knew it would be good, I just didn’t realise how good it would be. Now I know.

DRIVEN

HEAD TO HEAD

SEVEN SEATERS

These days family buses come in all shapes and sizes, but what if you're after one that the kids won't be embarrassed to be seen in?

WORDS JOE HOLDING **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

Is this the best looking seven seater you can buy right now? Rave all you like about the Range Rover or new Volvo XC90 or Volkswagen ID.Buzz, but it's up there. Confident, striking, unapologetic... if not entirely original. Tell us that's not a MkII Espace from the back. We are of course gushing over the Hyundai Santa Fe, and not the gopping red Routemaster we've dumped next to it.

Hmm, that sounds harsher than it's meant to. Mazda's one of those that's set itself ground rules for what its cars should look like, a doctrine laid down by the elegant Vision Coupe that wowed Tokyo some years ago. Applied to something much taller, the swooping lines and creased furrows of that concept don't rock the boat here. But in this company, the CX-80 looks a tad sorry for itself.

At the risk of sounding like Chandler Bing, could Hyundai's approach *be* more different? Skim its lineup and there's barely a shred of common DNA on display. Like its designers start each day locked inside a sensory deprivation tank with a can of Red Bull and 'Never gonna give you up' playing on repeat, before being bundled in the general direction of a sketchpad. Whatever the method, individuality has thrived in the madness of it all. The results speak for themselves.

At least you can't accuse Mazda of being stilted with electrification. It does the lot. Mild hybrid, full hybrid, plug-in hybrid, electric... heck, for the MX-30 it even revived the rotary engine so it could resurrect the range extender. Two birds unkilled with one stone! Hedging its bets, perhaps. In the CX-80 you can go against the grain with a 3.3 six pot diesel, or – unusually for a seven seater – a 2.5 petrol PHEV. So that's the one we've brought today, facing off against the Santa Fe's 1.6 petrol hybrid. Plugged versus unplugged. Let battle commence.

Let's start with the simplest one. The Hyundai's 1.6 4cyl develops 158bhp and the e-motor chips in 64bhp. Total power is slightly less than the sum, and looks weedy on paper. The 4WD is front biased and adds the equivalent of 21 adult lemurs (about 65kg, of course) to the weight. You'll get no more than a mile of e-range, the paddles giving you control of the regen in Eco mode and 6spd gearbox in Sport. Yes, *Sport*. In a de facto minibus. A lapse in judgement the CX-80 makes too.

Mazda's effort combines a meatier 2.5 petrol with six cylinders (that's more like it) and a leccy motor for a more adequate sounding 327bhp. It has almost 100 more torques than the Hyundai but they arrive later in the rev range – 4,000rpm to the Santa Fe's less agitated 1,500–3,500. The battery is 17.8kWh and promises 38 miles of engineless range. Call it 25ish, once you've discovered how hopelessly

WHAT ABOUT THESE?

SKODA KODIAQ

Need a do it all seven seater? Bin the hybrid gubbins save yourself £10k+ in the process with the Czech Republic's most versatile car

£39,000

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY

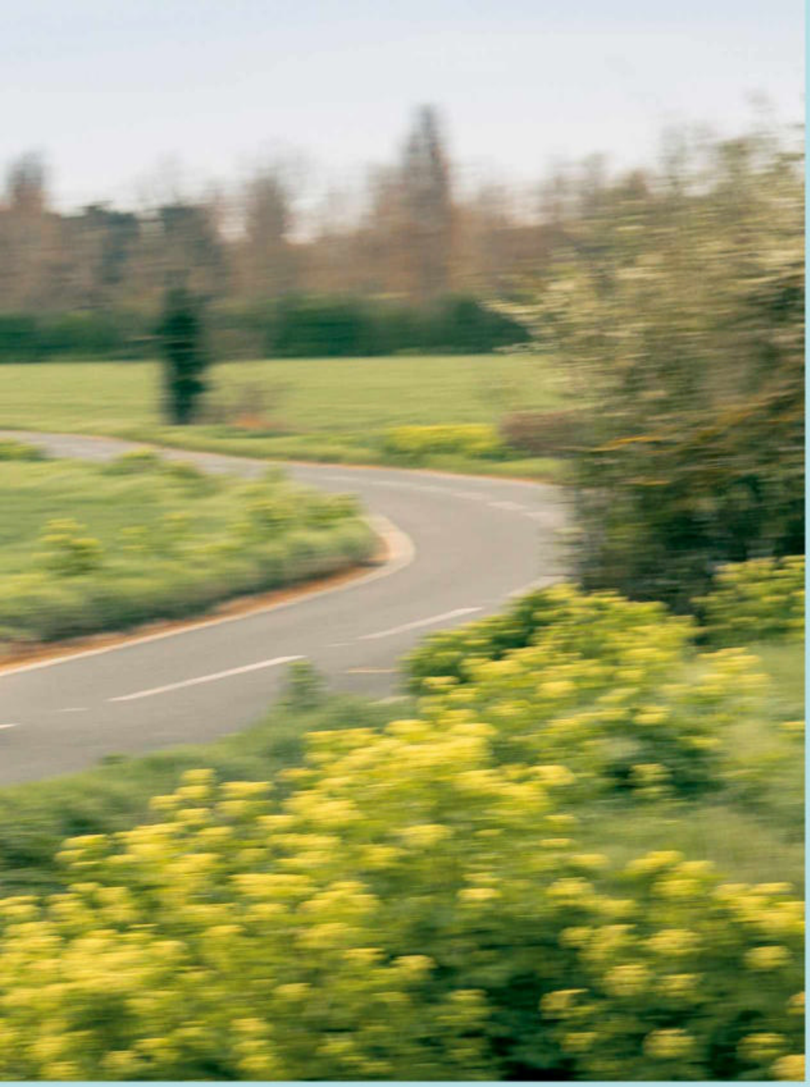
Or you could go entirely in the opposite direction and upgrade yourself to a Disco. Posher and tougher. Glitter ball not included

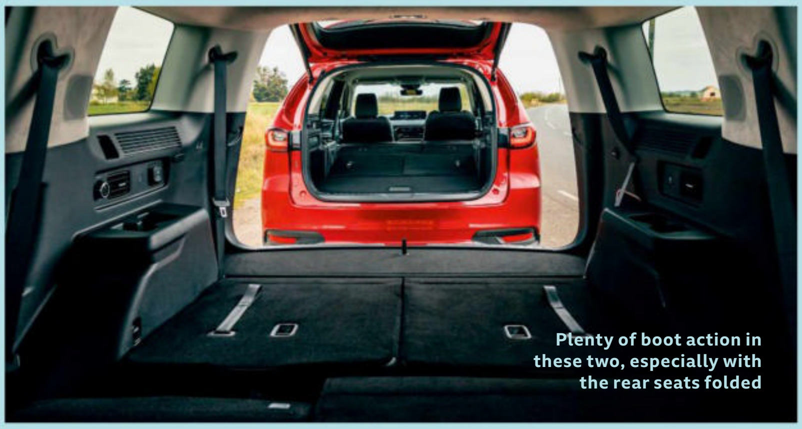
£56,170

VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ

Go on, make a statement signing for your driveway. A Buzz with seven seats onboard is the best kind of Buzz as far as we're concerned

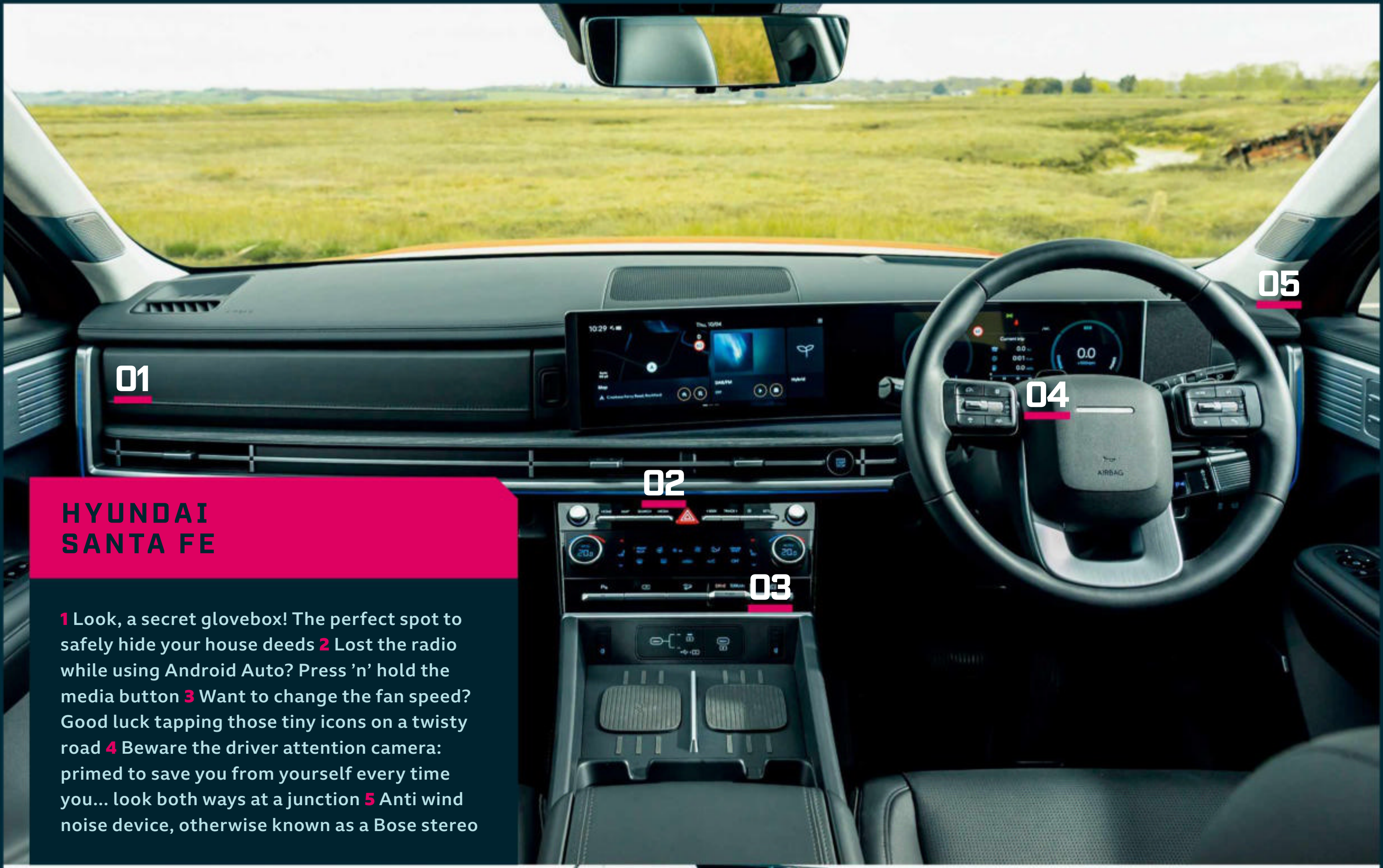
£59,645





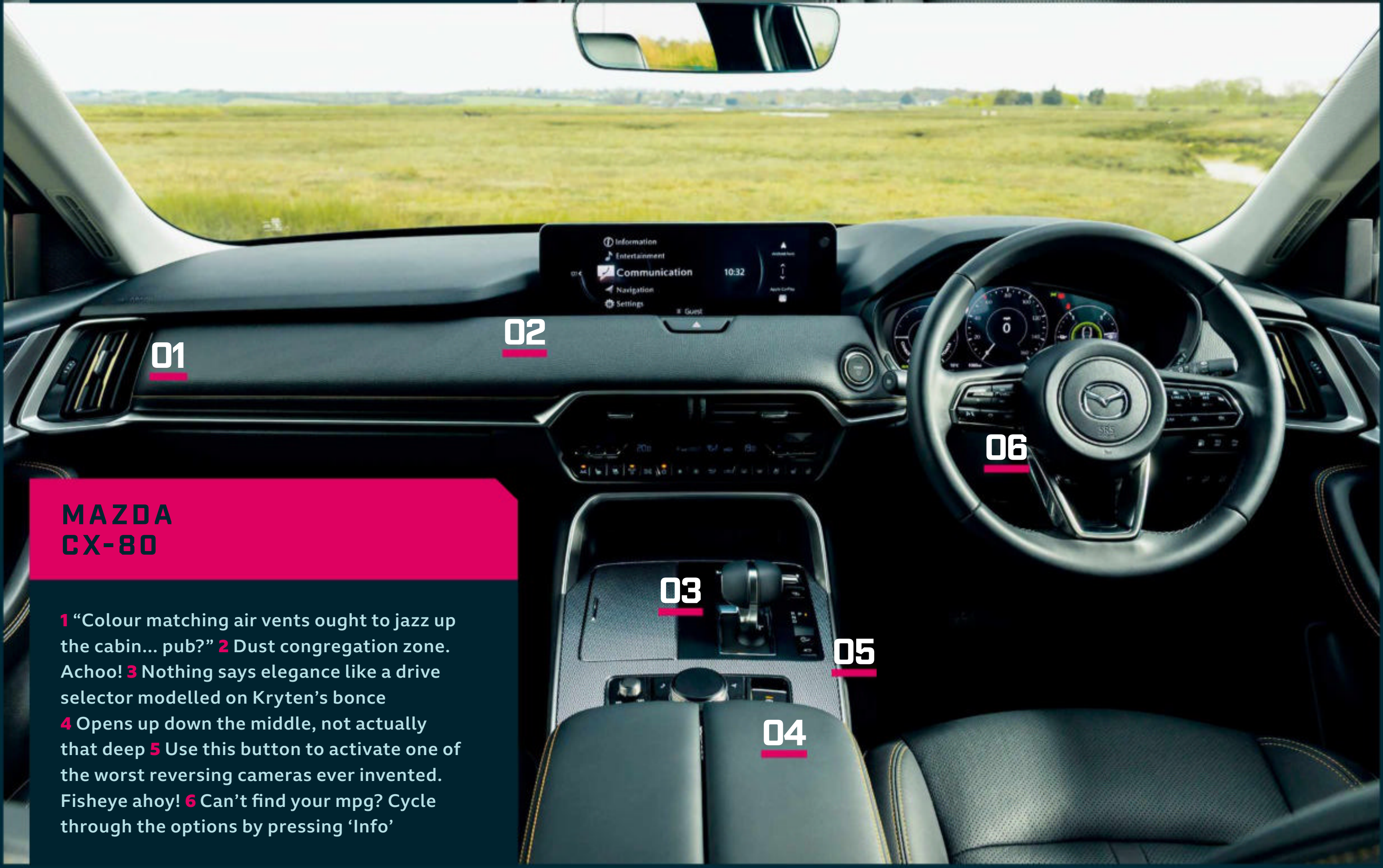
Plenty of boot action in these two, especially with the rear seats folded

“IN THIS COMPANY, THE MAZDA CX-80 LOOKS A TAD SORRY FOR ITSELF”



HYUNDAI SANTA FE

1 Look, a secret glovebox! The perfect spot to safely hide your house deeds **2** Lost the radio while using Android Auto? Press 'n' hold the media button **3** Want to change the fan speed? Good luck tapping those tiny icons on a twisty road **4** Beware the driver attention camera: primed to save you from yourself every time you… look both ways at a junction **5** Anti wind noise device, otherwise known as a Bose stereo



MAZDA CX-80

1 "Colour matching air vents ought to jazz up the cabin… pub?" **2** Dust congregation zone. Achoo! **3** Nothing says elegance like a drive selector modelled on Kryten's bonce **4** Opens up down the middle, not actually that deep **5** Use this button to activate one of the worst reversing cameras ever invented. Fisheye ahoy! **6** Can't find your mpg? Cycle through the options by pressing 'Info' slow e-mode actually is. Still, it outflanks Hyundai's PHEV option: only 13.8kWh and 34 e-miles to play with. Much less power too.

Press on in either car and they make an absolute racket. Crikey. Even that six pot is like listening to a bag of spanners being blended. While the blender itself is being crushed. The Santa Fe is more hoarse, the CX-80 more vociferous, but you'll actively avoid full throttle in both because of it. Forget speed limit warnings, this is your eardrums being held to ransom. "Take it easy, or the tympanic membrane gets it!" If you can block out the cacophony long enough, you will notice how the Hyundai has less to give after the e-motor's initial, gentle shove, while the Mazda doesn't let up. One gathers momentum, the other applies it.

This is no great surprise. Starting with the dynamics and worrying about the rest later *is* the Mazda way, regardless of who or what its cars are actually for. The CX-80 rides firmly and rebounds quicker from dips and camber. Its brakes are firm, but faithful and consistent. Body control and steering are both taut, although the front wheels don't talk much. Maybe they're Snapchatting with the teenagers in the back. It's quite clearly the better driver's car of these two. But who on earth buys a seven seater on that basis? No one. It'd be like picking clogs for a marathon because they're more appropriate than stilettos.

Nope, it's Hyundai who's understood the assignment. Fitted with MacPherson struts up front (Mazda's used double wishbones, both get multi-link rears), the Santa Fe is set up to be softer and more cushioning, like it actually cares about the delicate tummies in the middle and back rows. There's more roll – steer into a corner and the chassis goes first before the body is tugged along with it – and inevitably more vertical bounce, but it's still a very tidy thing. And vastly more comfortable for it. The steering's slightly dead off centre and the brakes a tad spongy, but they're predictable and unsullied by regen. Buffeting off the mirrors is slightly more pronounced, but all told you're far more removed from the road. Ahh.

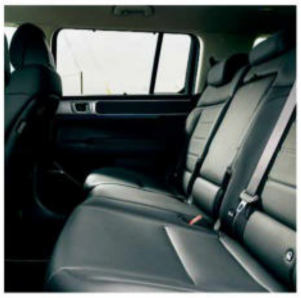
Inside, Hyundai has played another blinder. Admittedly this black clad mid spec (turns out Ultimate trim isn't really the *ultimate* trim) lacks the lighter, uplifting vibe of the free alternatives at this level, but in terms of layout and usability? Smashed it. The design as a whole is thoroughly modern, although the steering wheel shuns haptics for proper switchgear. Future generations will be forever grateful. Best of all is the storage: the double glovebox, double charging pads and double decker centre console storage mean that you'll run out of stuff before you run out of places to put it. We're less sold on the climate control touchpad – it looks cool, but it's annoying – and the drive selector's a major miss. Put it somewhere we can see it, please.

It'd suit the narrative for Mazda to claw back some initiative at this point, but sadly it's fighting against the tide. Gosh is it dreary in here, black surface upon black surface lashed together with chrome effect plastic and that horrid stuff on the centre console that looks like an offcut from a prop on *Red Dwarf*. Oh smeg. The less said about the touchscreen (a misnomer, it's not touch operated) the better: those tired old graphics should've been refreshed yonks ago. Thank God for smartphone mirroring. The screen itself looks like an afterthought, sinking into the dash as though perched on a tub of quicksand. Oh, and the stitching along the armrest digs into a bare forearm. Yes, we've gone full 'old man yells at cloud'.

To its credit, Mazda still excels at functionality. And not overdoing it. Physical climate controls ought to be on the critically endangered species

ITS ALL IN THE DETAILS

02
Driving Convenience
Driving safety
100
DAW (Driver warn
Parking safety



e SKYACTIV PHEV

1 The Hyundai's parking brake is loosey goosey, so if you stop on a slope get ready for a mini heart attack as it lollops forward **2** Too many prods needed to mute the Santa Fe's speed limit bonger, but it's easier to find than in the CX-80 **3** Boot camp... geddit?! **4** You can charge the Mazda's battery on the go. Makes the drive worse and tanks the mpg, mind. Avoid, avoid, avoid

SPECIFICATIONS

WINNER

	HYUNDAI SANTA FE ULTIMATE	MAZDA CX-80 EXCLUSIVE LINE	TESTER'S NOTES
PRICE	£53,445 OTR (£53,445 as tested)	£49,780 OTR (£54,030 as tested)	
POWERTRAIN	1598cc 4cyl petrol hybrid	2488cc 6cyl petrol + e-motor	*One's an HEV, the other's a PHEV. Neither sound good. Imagine two cats scrapping over a sausage roll behind a Greggs... these are worse*
TRANSMISSION	6spd auto, AWD	8spd auto, AWD	*Both cars let you take control with flappy paddles. Pointless. Unless it's to get round the Mazda's tendency to hold a ratio six weeks too long*
TOTAL POWER	212bhp	323bhp	*If you're lining up an overtake, the Mazda is the one you want. Hands down. But only after you've lifted your hands up to insert some earplugs*
TOTAL TORQUE	271lb ft	369lb ft	*Caravanning's like defecating, best not to think about people doing it. Still, Santa Fe can tow more than double the Mazda – up to 2,500kg – despite the torque deficit*
0-62mph	9.8secs	6.8secs	*This is a mullering. But look back at your passengers: how many of them actually enjoyed your top fuel dragster impersonation en route to Center Parcs?*
BATTERY SIZE, E-RANGE	1.49kWh, > 1 mile	17.8kWh, 38 miles	*You don't really notice the Santa Fe dipping in and out of e-mode. Like a waiter at a fine restaurant, refilling your wine glass like a besuited ninja*
CLAIMED ECONOMY/CO_2	38.2mpg, 168g/km	176.6mpg, 35g/km	*Once drained of e-juice, the Mazda settles just north of 30mpg. The Hyundai on the other hand can beat its WLTP prediction on a schlep*
WEIGHT	2,030kg	2,290kg	*About the same as your average mid-sized e-SUV then? Weird that the rise of electric porkers has made two and a bit tonnes normal*
BOOTSPACE	629/1,949 litres	687/1,971 litres	*Worried going PHEV will eat into bootspace? Fear not, the CX-80 hides its batteries in the middle of the wheelbase. Clever Mazda*
VERDICT	*Comfortable, practical and, dare I say it, desirable... this is a tremendously well executed thing. Yet another winner from a company that's transformed itself over the past 10 years and shows no sign of letting up*	*It seems Mazda doesn't know what to make of the new auto landscape, so it's sticking to its guns and hoping for the best. It means the CX-80 has to fight an uphill battle from the start, and ropey electrification seals its fate*	
SCORE	8	6	/10

list along with the black rhino and Yangtze finless porpoise, but the CX-80 provides a safe haven. The clickwheel – something BMW has recently done a 180 on – survives too, and there's so much to be said for being able to navigate the digital world without losing focus on the real one. Too many manufacturers have lost the plot on that front. Not Mazda.

Arguably, none of this matters to 86 per cent of these cars' occupants. What you really want to know is "Will my family resent me for putting them in one of these?" and "Will my hernia come back if I move the seats about?" On paper the CX-80 should have an advantage, being 165mm longer and 305mm more generous of wheelbase. Mind you, that battery's got to go somewhere...

Middle row first. The CX-80 predictably plays it straight: good leg and headroom and wiggle room for feet. The back of the centre console houses a pair of USB-Cs, and a digi readout for climate control. Noice. Curiously the Santa Fe gives this real estate to a pullout storage bin instead: overkill, since the centre console lid is double hinged and accessible anyway. Still, cavernous drinks holders, coat hooks, USB-Cs and an airline style magazine pocket show initiative, even if its marginally higher floor demands more knee bend. Seats six and seven are patently only for little ones (or big 'uns who've misbehaved) in both cars, but six footers will fit briefly.

Boot time. The Mazda doesn't suffer for being a PHEV, because its engineers have conjured up space for the cells in the middle of the floor. Bit embarrassing for Hyundai, which had to lose 20 litres of fuel tank and seven litres of boot for its plug-in version. Whoops. The key takeaways: the Mazda's seats don't quite fold flat, whereas the Hyundai's do. There are buttons on the middle row that do some (but not all) the leg work accessing the Mazda's jump seats, but on the Hyundai you can drop 'em with the touch of a button from the tailgate. Both provide AC power sockets but the Mazda's 1,500W three pin whumps the Hyundai's 200W two pin. On balance you'd probably give usability to the Mazda, but it's a close run thing and it comes after a shellacking in other departments.

At least the Mazda's wisely priced. This one's fitted with the £1,400 comfort pack that swaps out 18s for 20s, front seat ventilation and heated outer second row chairs, plus a £1,950 convenience pack including door blinds, wireless phone charging, 360° camera, adaptive LEDs and those handy AC sockets. Those add up to £3,350, and the doozy red paint is another £900. But forgo all that and you're getting that PHEV ability for a nip under £50k. That's where the 4WD hybrid Santa Fe *starts*, the plug-in demanding another £2k on top. Standard kit includes the 12.3in touchscreen, all-row USBs, single phone wireless charging, blinds and rearview camera, while this mid spec one adds an HUD, Bose audio, vented front/heated rear seats, dual wireless charging, 360° parking view and sunroof. Makes a big difference inside, that last one. It's steep at £53,455, but you can lop two grand off that if you can live with FWD. Which, let's face it, most can.

So the winner, in the orange corner, is the contender named after the state capital of New Mexico. Fundamentally Mazda has scuppered itself by taking a narrow view of a car with such a broad remit, while the Hyundai is cleverly packaged, attractively styled and, most importantly of all, has a clear sense of its own purpose.

"ON BALANCE YOU'D PROBABLY GIVE USABILITY TO THE MAZDA, BUT IT'S A CLOSE RUN THING"

THE OVERRUN

Small but perfectly formed reviews. The best of this month's drives

SCAN HERE FOR FULL REVIEWS OF EVERY NEW CAR

TOYOTA HILUX 48V HYBRID

£40,437 [exc VAT]

2.8T 4cyl	201 bhp	10.7 secs	27.9 mpg	265 g/km

WELL, HYBRID IN THE MILDEST possible sense: Toyota's fitted a piddly battery for enhanced stop/start and better mpg. Claims it's smoother too, but you'll barely notice. What *will* turn your head is Multi-Terrain Select, with modes for sand, mud, rock, dirt and deep snow. It gives the Hilux a bigger toolkit to go with that LSD and low range box. Soon to be seen on a farm track near you. **JH**

BYD SEALION 7 EXCELLENCE

£58,990

91.3 kWh	530 bhp	4.5 secs	133 mph	312 miles

BYD DID SOMETHING UNUSUAL with the Seal – a slinky saloon with the vibe of a supermarket own brand Taycan. The Sealion is not at all unusual. It's a biggish crossover. The cabin's fine, nicely finished with some good detailing and lots of rear room. Cornering and stability look after you but don't draw you in, so why would you want the 530bhp twin motor version? It only hits efficiency. **PH**

WOB TY 305
7/10

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON

£48,055

FOR As quiet as a cathedral hosting a sponsored silence

AGAINST The Skoda Kodiaq exists

BY OUR RECKONING THIS IS VW'S EIGHTH [!] SUV, PRONOUNCED TIE-RON like a forgotten Roman emperor and not Teigh-ron like a TikTok princess. It's barged into the gap between the Tiguan and the Touareg, VW believing its seven-seater deserves more than just the 'Allspace' tag.

It gets *six* powertrains – petrols, a diesel, a hybrid and *two* flavours of PHEV. Gosh. Except in the latter you can only have five seats, because of the big battery. VW expects those to be the most popular.

No, go for the 2.0 petrol and don't look back. It's smooth, responsive and doesn't disturb the peace. Of which there is much. Sound damping measures make it isolating from the outside world, and in tandem with the adaptive suspension it's calming to drive. Until you've strapped five kids in the back. At least the infotainment won't drive you loopy anymore. **JH**

2.0T 4cyl	261 bhp	6.1 secs	32.5 mpg	193 g/km

ALPINA B3 GT

£90,400

3.0 V6	522 bhp	3.5 secs	26.6 mpg	241 g/km

SNIFF, IT'S ONE OF THE LAST independently made Alpinas. Mourning's made easier by an extra slug of power and torque, deployed through a ZF box, fully variable all wheel drive and an e-LSD. Strewth, is it capable. Rapid? Yep. Comfy? You betcha. We're still sad though: BMW M has suffocated Alpina and the thinking person's M3 estate shouldn't tickle £100k. Pass the tissues. **JH**

LF25 VKK
6/10

MG S5 TROPHY

£33,495

62.1 kWh	170 bhp	6.3 secs	101 mph	288 miles

MG IS NOW THE ESTABLISHMENT here, with other Chinese brands snapping away at 'bargain' hunters. The S5 isn't cheap, but doesn't feel cheap either. It's roomy and better finished than the MG4. It ticks every box for car-agnostic families, other than a truly long range option. But those who want interesting design, a bit of spirit to the drive, or something of novelty or distinction, we'll pass. **PH**

SCAN HERE FOR FULL REVIEWS OF EVERY NEW CAR

8/10

DACIA BIGSTER

£27,995

FOR Value across the board, big boot, clever YouClip system

AGAINST Only OK to drive, you can see where savings are made at points

1.8T 4cyl hybrid	155 bhp	0–62 9.7 secs	61.4 mpg	CO₂ 105 g/km

SOUNDS LIKE A KID'S TOY, DOESN'T IT? BUT THE Dacia Bigster is actually quite a serious machine if you're in the market for something that can cope with big ideas for a bargain price. So let's start with that – the Bigster is a C segment SUV based on the same CMF platform as the Jogger and Duster, but is… bigger. The headline is that it's also a C segment SUV – Tiguan, Sorento, Qashqai, etc – that starts at £24,995 and tops out at a fiver under 30 grand. That's hatchback money. For that, you get a pleasantly Dacia styled, mid-sized, do it all wagon with some really nice touches.

Like the smaller Duster sibling, it looks more expensive than it is, with that slightly bulky, angular Dacia theme. Here it's longer and taller – but no wider – with deeper bumpers that absorb the extra height, and a maximalist rear end to account for the length. There are still the same rear doorhandles tucked into the C pillars, the same lower beltline of hardwearing plastics (bumper, wheelarches, sideskirts) made of Dacia's semi-recycled and slightly speckle tainted 'Starkle' plastic, the same 'DC' grille treatment. It's a Dacia by design and casual glance, enlarged a few points on the printer.

The advantages are in the boot and rear legroom. There's good space for five, 667 litres in the boot, with split/fold seats and a foldable centre that becomes an armrest/cupholders. Why not seven seats in the Bigster? Well, Dacia makes a couple of points. One, if you engineer in a niche for seven, you have to throw in a stronger rear axle, brakes and all the other addenda which pump up the price, and two, the Jogger already seats seven for those with extra people needs.

There are three engines to go with the three trim levels of Expression, Journey and Extreme. To start, there's a mild hybrid TCe 140 1.2 3cyl with just front wheel drive, 140bhp-ish and a manual. And by 'mild hybrid' we mean a big starter motor, so very mild. Then there's a similar – pure petrol – TCe 130 three-pot with 130bhp and all wheel drive – and a manual – which is interesting if you do a little light off roading. Then there's the flagship, full hybrid 155bhp automatic with front wheel drive only.

The hybrid is new, decent and parsimonious, running on EV only in town for a surprising amount of time, but not fast. A car where you don't really notice the performance one way or the other, and the same can be said – largely – of the ride and handling. It's neither brilliant nor awful, sitting in a niche of careful competency. But the Bigster does what it says on the tin – it's a bigger Duster for those with a need, and it does its job well.

Let's face it, if the Bigster was £5k more, we wouldn't be having this conversation. But it isn't. In a world where pricing makes you want to suck air through your teeth, this feels like good sense, and a value driven purchase price buys a lot of forgiveness for slightly hard plastics and average dynamics. TF

7/10

ALFA ROMEO JUNIOR VELOCE

£42,295

54 kWh	276 bhp	5.9 secs	124 mph	215 miles

ALFA'S HOT JUNIOR VELOCE MIRRORS THE Abarth 600e Scorpionissima in many ways, sharing the same platform, battery and e-motor. They're inseparable in a straight line, but the Junior is ahead in one key area: grip. Its Torsen LSD seems to let the oversteer happen a fraction later, which pays dividends on track. The Junior also swaps the fake sound generator for a more organic electrical hum, and let's be honest, which of the two looks more like a £42k car? **SA**

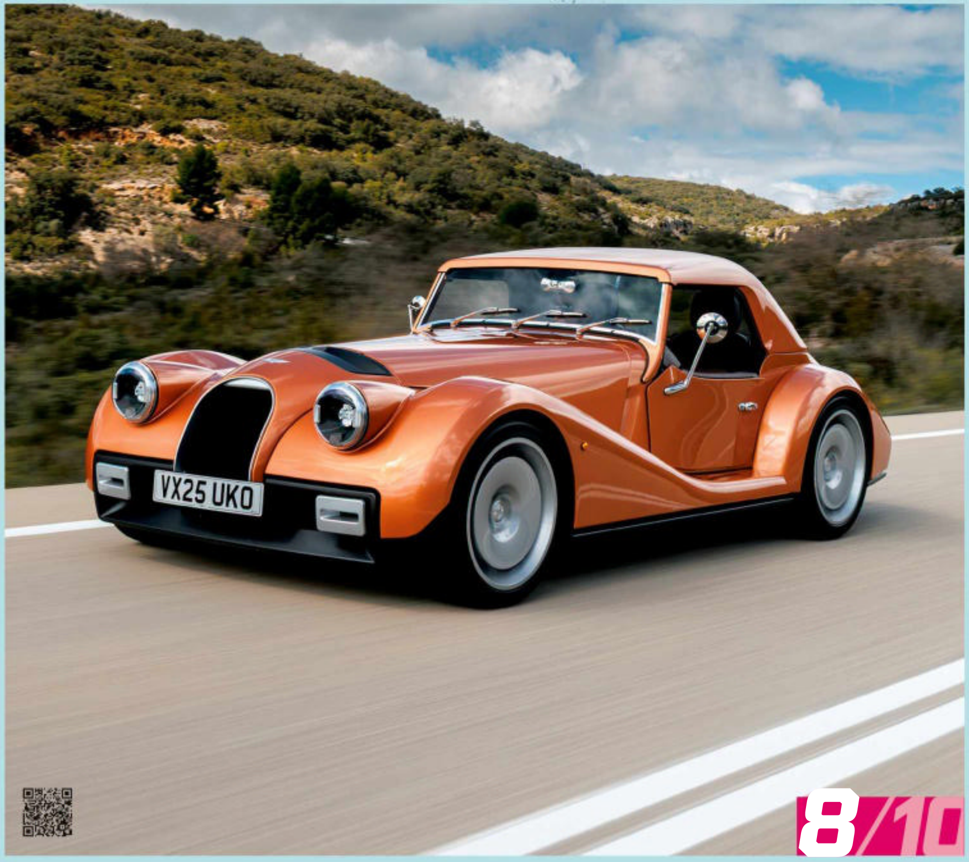
7/10

LI AUTO L9

£49,000 **[China only]**

1.5T 4cyl + e-motors	440 bhp	5.3 secs	n/a mpg	n/a g/km

ONE OF THE BEST RIDING SUVS THIS SIDE OF A Rolls-Royce Cullinan. Equipped with some of the most woeful brakes this side of a wooden toboggan. But who cares about that because it also has 11 cameras, lidar, radar, gesture control, soft close doors, a ceiling cinema screen, La-Z-Boy seats, 440 horsepower and an 817-mile range. This Chinese range extender hybrid isn't coming to the UK, but we kinda wish it was. More interesting than most. **OM**


8/10

MORGAN SUPERSPORT

£102,000

FOR The sharpest, sportiest Morgan yet. With a boot now, too

AGAINST Still notably less refined than its supposed rivals

3.0T 6cyl	335 bhp	3.9 secs	36.8 mpg	175 g/km

THE NEW MORGAN SUPERSPORT IS DESIGNED to fulfil the flagship role of Malvern's early 2000s Aero models. Like those, its styling might rub traditionalists up the wrong way with its overt signals that this is a modern, sophisticated Morgan. The outgoing Plus Six was precisely that – it just never quite looked it. Its BMW 3.0-litre 6cyl engine and 8spd auto gearbox continue here unchanged but are accompanied by an overhaul in most key areas.

An evolved platform brings a 10 per cent stiffer structure, this optional carbon hardtop further increasing rigidity. The steering is quicker and suspension much smarter, with 30mm of additional travel. Trick Nitron dampers sit on the options list while its wheels are 3kg lighter apiece and come wrapped in Michelin Pilot Sport 5 tyres. Altogether it's a deep line in the sand that this is a Morgan for driving rather than pootling.

Though it aims to do that with more panache, too. Initial miles will feel familiar to anyone who's driven a recent, CX platform car – lighter steering and less fuss than Mogs gone by, but still the same beguiling view down a long, sculptured bonnet and a minimalist (but gorgeously trimmed) interior. Speed bumps are now much less of a drama but wind noise continues to permeate the cabin at motorway speeds, roof up or down.

Detour to more interesting roads and its limits are clearly higher than before; the Supersport flicks into turns more eagerly while its rear Michelins cling on for longer as you exit. You get ESP and airbags nowadays, the former flashing cautiously if you've left it on, though its midway Sport mode provides welcome leeway without leaving you in the lurch. The brakes are a Plus Six carryover and don't inspire quite the same confidence.

Nevertheless, it's a capable car when pushed, even if the dynamics haven't leapt forward quite as much as the styling. It's notably more senior than the lithe, nimble Plus Four below it, the Supersport's greater width, kerbweight and straight six muscle serving up a steeper learning curve. But Morgans are typically bought for a lifetime, not leased, making a driving experience with patent longevity quite an appealing prospect. **SD**

GARAGE

INCLUDING

LAND ROVER DEFENDER · CUPRA TAVASCAN · BMW M135 · MG CYBERSTER · DACIA DUSTER · BMW M5 · SKODA SUPERB · RICCI'S GARAGE · ASTON DB12 · VW ID.7 · PORSCHE MACAN

REPORT 7

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130

£115,435 OTR/£117,375 as tested/£1,784 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Is the biggest Defender the best?

DRIVER: JACK RIX

I THOUGHT OUR EIGHT SEATER Defender 130 V8, weighing in at £117k as tested, was overkill. Land Rover thought "hold my beer", because the Marine Blue 110 five seat station wagon you see here is a Land Rover Classic Defender V8 by Works Bespoke – try saying that while you traverse a peat bog. This is an offering from Land Rover Classic, which takes old Defenders built between 2012 and 2016, and remasters them with a 5.0-litre V8 sending 399bhp and 380lb ft of torque through an eight speed ZF auto to all four wheels. And then charges extortionate amounts of money for it.

Before we get to the price, I should say there is a bewildering array of customisation options on offer – some of which we got to poke around in the spec room at LR Classic's HQ when we went to pick up the car. You can literally match your paint to your favourite horse using Land Rover's 'match to sample' service. There's the option of 16in Wolf wheels or 18in Sawtooth alloys, and you can add roof-mounted spotlights or an LED light bar. You can have a Heritage, Standard or Adventure grille, and Recaro seats inside if you must, plus there's a choice of eight leather colours for the interior.

The spec for the car we drove appears to be 'yes'. Spotlights, external expedition cage, roof rack, Heritage grille, 16-inch steelies, Liberty Blue and Perlino DuoTone interior... the list goes on, and so does the price – £214,225 before tax. That's £257,070, or roughly 2.2 of our 130 V8s. I beg your pardon?

For that sort of money surely it drives night and day better than the standard car, or does something other than being very leathery and festooned in high end kit? It does get Alcon brakes and upgraded suspension, which is reassuring, but a couple of corners in and it feels mildly dangerous. The engine and gearbox take a moment to work out what your planted right foot wants, then tear off in a volatile explosion of forward momentum, pitch and roll that feels like sailing a fishing trawler with a powerboat engine.

The steering is slow and ponderous, the body control is... well there isn't any, so you're left pointing it in the vague direction of intended travel and hoping for the best. Now I know that the Defender has long since traded

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Price only affordable by elite footballers. Looks like this one is off to Chelsea then

Say "a quarter of a million quid" quickly enough and it sounds totally fiiiiine

on the appeal of its old school, analogue, heavily compromised driving experience, and I'm all for cars with big character, but here it's gone full caricature. It looks lovely, from the outside at least, but once you've heard the price tag you can't unhear it and that takes it from being charming to a little crass. A trinket for the garage, rather than a Land Rover you'll actually want to drive.

I do have one positive thing to say about this Marine Blue 110 five seat Land Rover Classic Defender V8 station wagon by Works Bespoke – and breathe – it makes the 130 look like a total bargain. Jumping back into it after a day in the glitter-rolled old timer, it's a majestic thing to rumble along in. Throttle response measured in seconds not minutes, freakish body control, responsive steering, plus, by comparison, the ride and refinement of a Rolls-Royce. Moral of the story? Don't be seduced by shiny things, use your head and spend £117k on a five metre long, eight seater V8 Land Rover. Or 2.2 of them if you can afford it.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 5000cc supercharged V8, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 493bhp, 450lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.4secs, 149mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,670kg
ECONOMY: 19.6mpg, 325g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 6,843 **OUR MPG** 19.8

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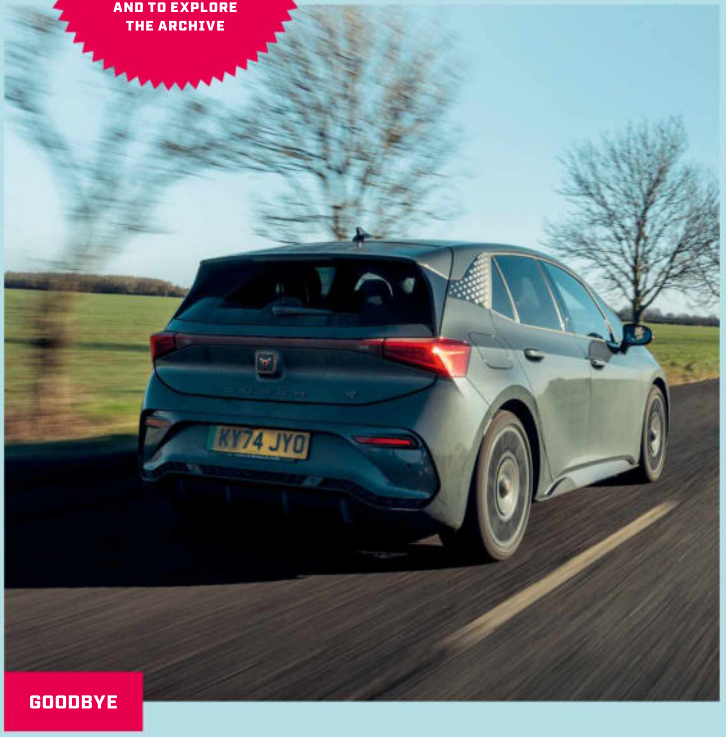


GOODBYE

CUPRA BORN

£44,625 OTR/£46,697 as tested/£442 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Can this livened up EV prove that electric hot hatches are worth a go?

DRIVER: GREG POTTS

CUPRA'S 'LOVE ME OR LEAVE ME' offer for all private buyers of a Born in the UK means that if you've paid cash, you'll get a 97 per cent refund of the amount you paid for the car if you don't want to keep it after three months of ownership. If you've kept it in good nick, of course.

Despite six months of ownership passing, I'm not sure I'd be taking Cupra up on its refund. The Born held up remarkably well with no issues to report. No bits of trim fell off, the excellent bucket seats look like they've barely been sat in and the infotainment system worked perfectly after one early wobble without requiring any OTA updates.

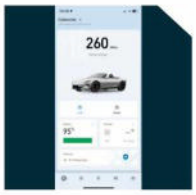
Although, thanks to the cold winter temperatures I averaged a real world range of just under 270 miles on a single charge. And with that relative lack of efficiency and without the safety net of home charging, I rarely drove the VZ like a proper hot hatch. So, although it is decent fun when the opportunity presents itself, for me those opportunities were too few and far between. If I was spending my own money on a Born, it'd go on a lesser trim level with the 77kWh battery.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 79kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 322bhp, 402lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.6secs, 124mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,999kg
ECONOMY: 4.1mpkWh, 366 miles

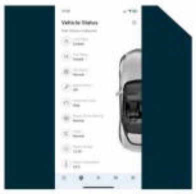
MILES SO FAR 3,481 OUR MPKWH 3.4

MG CYBERSTER

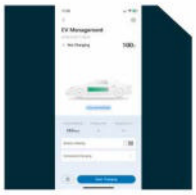


'MG iSMART' has a two star App Store rating. Not hard to see why: it's laggy, riddled with bugs and sparse on features

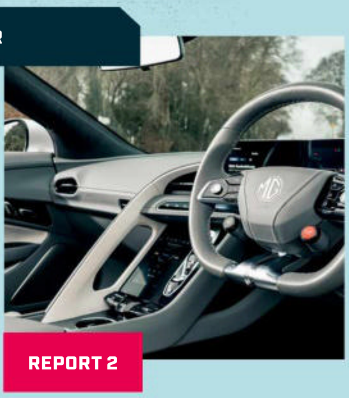
Heater can be manually activated, but you can't set it to automatically pre-condition the cabin



Location and real time range often fails to update, so can you be sure when it says it's locked, it's locked?



'Start charging' button doesn't work, so I always trigger a charge manually via my home wall box's app



REPORT 2

MG CYBERSTER

£54,995/£55,540/£970

WHY IT'S HERE:

Because it's quite simply the only purely electric sports car in the world (for now...)

DRIVER: OLLIE KEW

AS A PRODUCT OF 21ST CENTURY China, I hoped the MG's infotainment would make anything European feel as advanced as a mud hut, and its smartphone app would be positively telepathic. But here's hope for Europe: the Cyberster's a tech flop.

Its screens were designed by people who never met, and definitely never sat in the car. That's why the two flanking instrument screens are wholly obscured by the steering wheel and why the graphics don't match.

I usually keep the portrait centre console screen on the 'MG Pilot' display so I've quick access to deactivate the overactive lane keep assist beeps. Handily there's a haptic panel for shortcutting heater controls, so I only need visit the HVAC screen to crank up the heated seats and wheel. And as you can see to the left, the app ain't much better...

SPECS

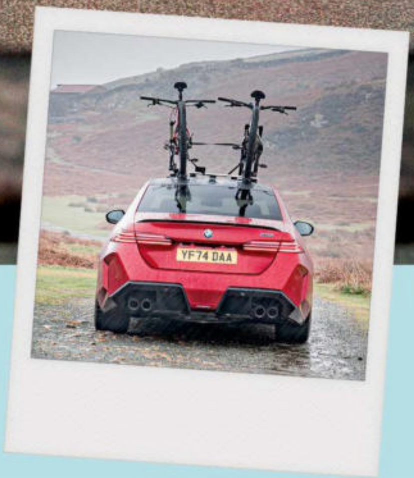
POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 74kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 335bhp, 350lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.0secs, 121mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,885kg
ECONOMY: 4.2mpkWh, 316 miles

MILES SO FAR 7,769 OUR MPKWH 3.0

The Smallest House
IN GREAT BRITAIN
Smallest House

REPORT 2

“It’s the same size as the previous gen 7-Series”



BMW M5

£111,405 OTR/£131,950 as tested/£1,587 pcm

WHY IT’S HERE:

Furiously complex, huge and heavy – is the M5 headed in the right direction?

DRIVER: *OLLIE MARRIAGE*

GO ON, GUESS WHICH ONE’S bigger. The red one. No, the other red one etc. Although the car is close and the house is further away, I reckon you can see which way this one’s going. The Guinness-recognised ‘Smallest House in Great Britain’ measures 3.05m deep by 1.82m wide which, expressed in property terms, gives it a square footage of 59.7. The BMW M5: 108.4.

Even if you turned the two-room-plus-staircase property into a bungalow it would still shade less acreage than the M5. It’s too big. We all know that cars grow, that the Polo now is as big as the Golf three generations back, but the 5-Series has made that jump in one: it’s the same size as the previous generation 7-Series, the G11. The 5,096mm long M5 is just 2mm shorter, but 68mm wider and 40-odd mm taller as well.

Whatever fine margins exist that allow cars to fit down country roads with confidence, this latest M5 has overstepped them. It’s too nervewracking, you can’t relax. It does drive well, I enjoy the powertrain’s massive, effortless, immediate thrust, the steering’s accuracy, but finding somewhere to relish all of this is challenging. Not that I was planning to charge across Snowdonia with a pair of bikes on the roof. Not an official roofrack for the M5’s carbon fibre top, but I’ve extolled the virtues of Seasucker racks before. Did belt ’n’ braces it this time – that’s 10 suckers up there to spread the load given one of the bikes was electric. The thing is Specialized’s Levo SL is a lightweight e-bike. Where most are 25kg, this one’s only 17.5kg. Be handy if BMW applied the same philosophy to the M5, wouldn’t it?

If you’ve wanted an M5 at any time in the past, it was saloon shaped, but now there’s an M5 that can carry kit better. So tune in next month when this saloon will have morphed into a Touring.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 4395cc TT V8 + e-motor, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 717bhp, 737lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.5secs, 155mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,435kg
ECONOMY: 176.6mpg, 34g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,560 OUR MPG 33.0

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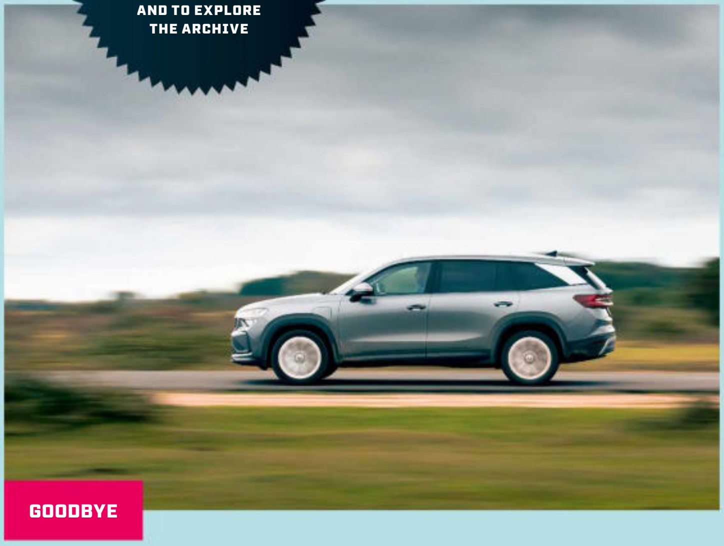


GOODBYE

SKODA KODIAQ PHEV

£44,635 OTR/£47,960 as tested/£516 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: All the car your family will ever need – but will you want for more?

DRIVER: *BEN PULMAN*

THE KODIAQ'S TIME WITH *TG* IS up, but to reach a conclusion on the past six months we need to separate out the verdict into both a general judgement and one based on my own irregular requirements.

The latter first, and here size matters because I sit/stand/sprawl above the 99th percentile. The Skoda has a big boot and a big wheelbase and so I like it. I'll also mark the Kodiaq highly because it goes big on battery size: 25.7kWh (19.7kWh usable), which translates to over 60 miles between charges. Overall, across just under 6,000 miles, we averaged 115mpg.

Taken objectively rather than subjectively, it felt like it needed another five per cent of finessing. The electric motor was a little vocal under braking, the blending between mechanical and regenerative occasionally a little clumsy, and with any steering lock applied, a swift electric only exit from a junction tended to amusingly spin up the inside wheel.

Six months ago, I started the first report with the story I'd convinced my best man to buy a MkI Skoda Kodiaq, because 'Skoda' was usually the answer to what car anyone should buy. I stand by that. It's been a brilliant big workhorse and I've not coveted anything else since it first arrived.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1498cc turbo 4cyl petrol + e-motor and 25.7kWh battery, 6spd auto, FWD

PERFORMANCE: 201bhp, 258lb ft, 0-62mph in 8.4secs, 130mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,977kg

ECONOMY: 565mpg, 11g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 8,169 **OUR MPG** 114.2

REPORT 4

DACIA DUSTER

£25,945 OTR/£26,595 as tested/£128 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: The Duster now looks funky and has gone hybrid: still a budget hero?

DRIVER: *CHARLIE ROSE*

THE MAJORITY OF MY TIME WITH THE DACIA DUSTER so far has been spent crawling around town, where it's perfectly content. The hybrid powertrain gives you a nice boost pulling out of junctions, the raised ride height offers a good view of traffic, and while it's big, it's not oversized – so it threads through streets with ease. It's simple, unfussy transport.

But then I had to do a long round trip from London to Dorset and back. A modest motorway run. A chance to see how the Duster hybrid copes with a few hours of high speed cruising. And it becomes rather clear that this isn't its natural environment. Wind and road noise creep in above 60mph, and the engine gets a bit shouty when asked to accelerate with any urgency. You find yourself constantly fiddling with the volume controls just to cut through all the external noise.

That said, the ride is comfortable, and handling wise it doesn't feel out of its depth at higher speeds. The seats were fine too, no complaints of sore backs or any wriggling around to find a comfortable position.

So it's not that the Duster can't do motorway miles. It can, if you're willing to accept it's a bit noisy. And that's OK. It doesn't pretend to be anything it's not. But perhaps its newer, bigger brother, the Bigster, would be more suitable for long distance cruising.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1598cc turbo 4cyl hybrid, FWD

PERFORMANCE: 139bhp, 109lb ft, 0–62mph in 9.8secs, 106mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,380kg

ECONOMY: 56.5mpg, 114g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 4,104 **OUR MPG** 49.2

Ricci's GARAGE

REPORT 58

THIS MONTH: MARK'S DECIDED TO GIVE HIS 991 GT3 RS SOME LOVE

In a very rare turn of events, I've spent this month doing something quite sensible: I've decided to look after one of the cars I already own. A few years ago I bought a 991 GT3 RS. Within three months I took great pride in doubling its mileage and using it for every journey possible, be that the school run or taking the dog to the vet, which does require popping out the fire extinguisher first. There was also once where my daughter left her coat in the footwell after going to the park. This in itself wasn't an issue, however the several snails she'd picked up and placed in her pockets later would be. This only came to light the following day when several trails were spotted across the dashboard, something Porsche's R&D department never factored in.

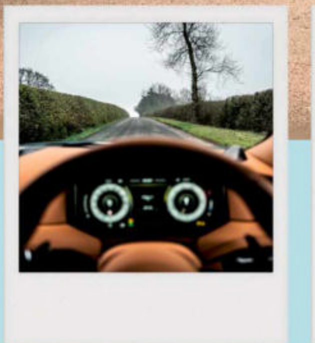
I never found those snails, but it did provide a necessary wake up call that I should probably look after the RS a bit better. Over that time several wheels were now chipped, the paint had to be corrected and the interior – aside from harbouring snails – was becoming quite scuffed. Before I could do any further damage, I looked into the world of PPF (paint protective film) to see if it would be worth the cost in the long run. I've never had any PPF on any car before, and my only past experience was seeing god awful installs that resembled clingfilm being used rather than protective film.

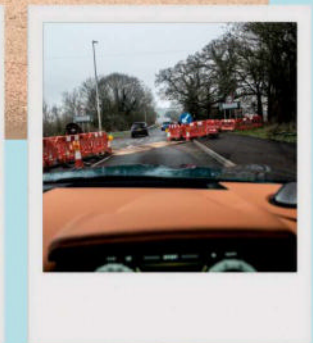
After a bit of research I settled on a company called XPEL for a few key reasons. Firstly, it's been around for a very long time – 1997 in fact – and as such it's built up a decent selection of products depending on what budget and what kind of protection you're after. But what really impressed me with XPEL is the huge range of car makes and models it has on file. Rather than drape a gigantic sheet of film over a car and hope for the best, XPEL has templates stored within its database specific to individual cars that allows individual panels to be cut and wrapped with minimal waste. Not only does this save money by cutting down the amount of film needed, but it also provides a much cleaner look as each panel's protective film is precisely cut to shape making it incredibly difficult to spot whether it's even had PPF applied.

For my GT3, I settled on XPEL's Ultimate Plus range which boasts more features than just protection against paint damage. The film also protects against UV exposure, but also contaminants like bird muck that will actually burn into your paintwork if not removed leaving long term damage. It will also 'heal' itself apparently, which is activated by the sun's heat meaning it'll actively reduce swirl marks and light scratches on the film every time it's heated up.

PPF is a bit like buying decent tyres for your car. It's not always the most exciting thing to spend money on, nor is it immediately noticeable. But it's also one of those things which should – touch wood – save you more money in the long term than the initial cost. I know I can't be trusted to properly look after any car I own, so having XPEL do a lot of that hard work for me does give me some peace of mind.

Renowned photographer Mark has been working with **TopGear** *for many, many years. When not taking photos he's buying inappropriate cars. Here he shares his addiction with the world*





REPORT 2

ASTON MARTIN DB12

£185,000 OTR/£240,000 as tested/£1,849 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Aston's GTs are increasingly sporty: too much for the daily grind?

DRIVER: ROWAN HORNCASTLE

"WE SHOULD GO ON A LUXURY hotel and spa weekend," I shouted from the sofa to my wife. "That's what Aston Martin owners do, right?!" Unsurprisingly, she lapped up the idea. Which was brilliant, as I – with a sprinkling of spouse subterfuge – had a plan.

See, Aston has had a few stabs at getting the DB12's platform right. And to test it, I wanted to put it through its paces where the car was developed, roads which wind around Aston's nerve centre in Gaydon, spill onto the M40, and meander through the Cotswolds.

Luckily, nestled along this route, just a stone's throw from the factory, is Mallory Court Hotel and Spa. Set within 10 acres of elegant, landscaped gardens, this country manor house and luxury hotel is the kind of place where you expect an Aston Martin to be parked.

You can see why Aston does this development route, as it has a bit of everything – sweepers, roadworks, mixed muddy surfaces, fast open sections and a bit of the humdrum town stuff. Plus, being British roads, they're the worst surfaces the world can deliver.

But it made for a proper development drive. And I came back with a notepad full of remarks (which you can read in full in my report on TopGear.com) but also a giant smile on my face as the DB12 really does enjoy being hustled. A fact I could bore my wife to tears with over a delicious afternoon tea complete with finger sandwiches, freshly baked scones, clotted cream and jam. Perfect. With an Aston Martin parked outside, it couldn't feel more British and special. Which makes you want to work a bit harder so you can visit and stay at places like Mallory Court more often. Especially as you can give the car a good workout over a weekend while the wife is having a Zen experience. That's a win-win for all involved.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 3982cc twin turbo V8, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 671bhp, 590lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.6secs, 202mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,685kg
ECONOMY: 23.2mpg, 278g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 1,132 **OUR MPG** 22.6

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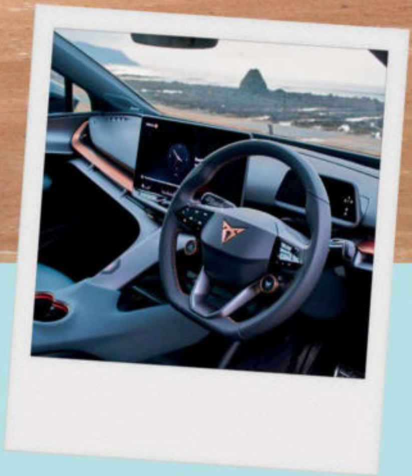
HELLO

"Of the nine mid-size EVs in the VW Group, it's the most fun"



CUPRA TAVASCAN

£60,835 OTR/£61,815 as tested/£813 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Does a surfeit of sportiness compromise an otherwise perfectly good EV?

DRIVER: PAUL HORRELL

THREE AND A HALF YEARS AGO I took delivery of a £40k Cupra and the *TG*.com comments section was full of, "A 40 grand Cupra? Are you mad?" Still, it was rather wonderful. And now I'm in a £60k Cupra.

Quick recap: it's one of the many related mid-sized EVs in the VW Group: the ID.4 and 5, the Audi Q4 e-tron and Sportback, the Skoda Enyaq and its Coupe. Indeed the Ford Explorer and Capri too. So that's nine. The Cupra has the lairiest design, especially in its cabin, at least within the strict lairiness limits of family crossovers.

Of all those nine cars, the Cupra is probably the most fun. But I'm not sure this top VZ2 spec is the way to go. It's the twin motor powertrain, but the front motor doesn't actually add much – the RWD is 286bhp, the AWD 340. Drive those two back to back and the performance difference isn't huge.

There's an efficiency trade off too. Especially when the car I'm in is the top spec with 'performance' 255/50 21in tyres. Yeah they're grippy, but I haven't really been able to take advantage, while I've certainly had the chance to rue their resistance. Early motorway journeys in 5–7°C were scoring about 2.5mpkWh, meaning max range of around 190 miles. Now the weather is warmer range is up to 250 miles. A heat pump by the way is optional and not fitted.

Still the Tavascan is roomy and well enough equipped to justify the price. We're looking at fancy LED lighting, heated and cooled electric seats, a superb Sennheiser stereo, adaptive damping, self-parking, and AR HUD. But that's nearly all on the second rung version of the RWD Tavascan.

Really, it's another example of a perfectly good EV slightly undermined in its top model by excess commitment to acceleration and grip. The cheaper spec, on more eco-biased tyres, is the better buy.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: two electric motors, 77kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 340bhp, 402lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.5secs, 112mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,200kg
ECONOMY: 3.9mpkWh, 298 miles

MILES SO FAR 2,454 **OUR MPKWH** 2.8

HELLO

"Has a car like this still got a place at the table?"

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

£48,055 OTR/£50,725 as tested/£505 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: We suspect a classic diesel estate still has its place, even against the rise of the e-SUV...

DRIVER: *Tom Ford*

WELCOME TO THE BEST CAR IN THE *TG* Garage. The office will probably disagree, but if you need a car that makes a decent fist of pretty much everything you need to deal with in *real* life, then you can't really argue with this one too hard.

So what have we got? Well, it's a plain old school diesel estate car. Has a car like this still got a place at the table when everything else hangs on higher riding, electrified underpinnings? The answer in the first 1,000 or so miles is immediately yes. It's fast enough but not licence threatening, has been managing an easy 45–48mpg which feels like it'll improve, rides well, has accurate steering and feels very light compared to anything electric. It handles better than you think, and way better than any SUV. Oh, and a 66 litre tank of diesel sees you right for 650–675 miles so far.

But the big news is that it's just so damn practical. Front and rear seats are roomy, well appointed and comforting. I know, I have officially become old, but a 690 litre boot that opens out with the rear seats folded – via levers in the boot – to 1,920 litres is so friendly for family life, it's unreal. Skoda also knows that it's the details that count. There's the usual umbrella in the driver's door, a jumbo centre console, loads of charging points, tablet and phone holders... storage up the wazoo... so far there aren't any glaring weak spots apart from it sounding very much like a diesel – after years of EVs, that stop/start diesel re-fire sounds gruff – and a very cheap feeling gear selector. For something you touch every time you drive the car, it seems a weird place to save some pennies.

The Superb Estate range starts at just under £37k OTR, and ours isn't cheap at £50k. Generally though? First impressions are everything, and the Superb Estate takes very little getting used to – it's cracking right from the off.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1968cc, 4cyl turbodiesel, AWD

PERFORMANCE: 190bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 7.6secs, 142mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,565kg

ECONOMY: 47.4mpg, 156g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 1,132 **OUR MPG** 47.7

GO TO
TOPGEAR.COM
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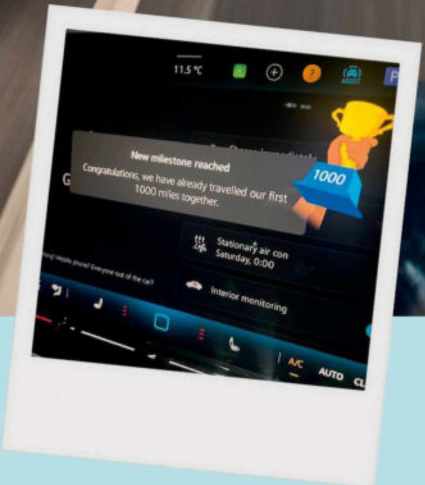
GOODBYE

"Conclusion? This is VW's best EV, and by some distance"



New milestone reached

Congratulations, we have already travelled our first 1000 miles together.

VOLKSWAGEN ID.7

£51,550 OTR/£52,030 as tested/£478 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: To discover if VW has actually mastered electrification

DRIVER: JASON BARLOW

AFTER A BUMPY FEW YEARS, HERE'S a VW that remembers what VW is actually good at. It's well made, inside and out, all its major contols are expertly calibrated, and there's a superior sense of wellbeing that's reassuring in a world gone nuts.

The ID.7 is designed to be a supremely comfortable, long range electric saloon. Yet it's also surprisingly agile and entertaining. Its propensity for flat cornering, the fluent ride and impressive body control belie its sizeable mass. Not that I went chasing that many corners, to be honest. As ever in an EV, efficiency becomes more relevant, and we averaged 3.7 miles per kWh. That would increase in warmer weather, so reckon on around 320 miles of range.

The UX is vastly improved following VW's early misadventures. The smartphone mirroring never missed a beat, and exiting it to return to the DAB is an easy process once sussed. As is disarming the speed limit warning and lane assist, achievable with two button pushes.

Now let's talk about problems. Prime among them are the brakes which blend friction and regen with only adequate efficacy. Sure, you get used to them after a while, although they're never less than wooden in feel. Bottom line is, the car stops OK, but needs more feel.

The remote locking function was glitchy, sometimes working smoothly, on other occasions taking its sweet time. There are no physical buttons for the aircon, everything being ceded to the central touchscreen. Push the climate button and you get an impressive graphical representation of the entire dashboard, on which you then have to fiddle about to get the appropriate air vent to do the appropriate blowing.

Seven months with the ID.7 confirm it's a roomy and versatile machine. Sure, it's subtle and doesn't shout about its prowess. But right now that's an admirable USP.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 77kWh battery, RWD

PERFORMANCE: 282bhp, 402lb ft, 0–62mph in 6.5secs, 112mph

KERBWEIGHT: 2,172kg

ECONOMY: 4.7mpkWh, 383 miles

MILES SO FAR 5,750 **OUR MPKWH** 3.7

GO TO
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HELLO

PORSCHE MACAN

£96,900 OTR/£108,079 as tested/£1,636 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: It's our reigning 'Performance SUV of the Year'

DRIVER: BEN PULMAN

ON THE DAY THIS TURNED UP, Porsche confirmed it was working on a new SUV with combustion and hybrid powertrains. Which might not seem newsworthy at all, but when's the last time since Dieselgate any manufacturer announced an all-new model that wasn't either totally electric, or able to be electric alongside conventional combustion?

Thing is, when Porsche made the decision to make the second generation Macan electric only everything pointed to mass EV uptake. But in the intervening years, the public hasn't embraced electric like governments and manufacturers had planned, hoped and increasingly prayed. The solution is another SUV, which almost certainly will share its underneath bits with Audi's Q5 – just as the MkI Macan did.

Let's leave all that now though, because the here and now sees this Porsche Macan on the *TopGear* fleet. And whatever turmoil exists around it, it's here on merit, as both the winner of our 'Best EV Sports SUV' category in the 2024 *TopGear* EV Awards, and as our 'Performance SUV of the Year' in the 2024 *TopGear* Awards. You don't get two such gongs without being properly good, so we're expecting to be impressed in the coming months…

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: two electric motors, 100kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 630bhp, 833lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.3secs, 162mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,405kg
ECONOMY: 3.1mpkWh, 340 miles

MILES SO FAR 6,353 **OUR MPKWH** 3.0

WHAT ELSE WE'RE RUNNING

REPORT 5

CITROEN e-SPACETOURER

Though the e-SpaceTourer looks large, it'll squeeze in spaces smaller than you might expect. With shortish overhangs front and rear, I've found it far less of a pain to get parked than I expected – and with sliding rear doors, the backseat passengers can escape from even the tightest of supermarket parking spaces. SP

REPORT 5

PEUGEOT 3008

For a while I've been feeling like I see absolutely loads of 3008s on the road. And I have – there are a lot of them around. The 3008 has sold 100,000 units since its launch just over six months ago. In the UK alone, Peugeot has sold 25,000 units. So no wonder I think I'm seeing them everywhere… it's because I am! EN

REPORT 3

BMW M135

I find myself very happy about the M135's efficiency: 37.2mpg for a car this fast and practical seems pretty amazing to me. The M135 seems almost as good as its word even when driven with a bit of enthusiasm. So while the Beemer isn't quite setting my hair on fire, nor is it melting my credit card. JB

JCB
AGRIXTRA
JCB
JCB
SCANIA

PROJECT CORNER

"*TG* wants to right at least some of the less sympathetic wrongs"

OPERATION RALLYE RENAISSANCE

WHAT IS IT? This Peugeot 106 – as seen on Series 26 of the telly show – has been to Nepal and back, but now we're trying to restore it to its former glory

WRITER: *TOM FORD*

YOU MAY REMEMBER A certain *TG* special that involved Freddie, Paddy and Chris bimbling with intent from Kathmandu in Nepal to Lo Manthang on the Tibetan plateau, wrapped in a locally assembled Hulas Mustang, a Renault 4 and a Peugeot 106. Interesting enough, but there was one thing that stood out: Paddy's car was none other than a 106 Rallye – an S2 to be exact – a car that really should be battering around a B-road, rather than being beaten up off it. We're talking about a car that is essentially a homologation special for Group N rallying, with a 1.6-litre four pot and no turbos. A frictionless feeling, non turbo manual car with a massive... 103bhp. But S2 Rallyes weigh much less than a tonne (865kg), so they're the antithesis of obese modernity.

And we think we need to bring a little bit of that back.

The story goes that the 106 was repatriated to appear in the *TopGear* display at Beaulieu's National Motor Museum, and has languished ever since in the state that it came home. Well, *TopGear* magazine wants to right at least some of the less sympathetic wrongs, and we're going to bring the car back to life. If we can. Currently, it's not quite as bad as it may seem. OK, so there's no back window, the body is in a bit of a state, the exhaust needs rehanging, the interior still has most of Nepal in it, and there's a lot of work to do. But we're getting help. And hopefully, we're getting a 106 Rallye back.

UBISHI
317 VHM
PEUGEOT

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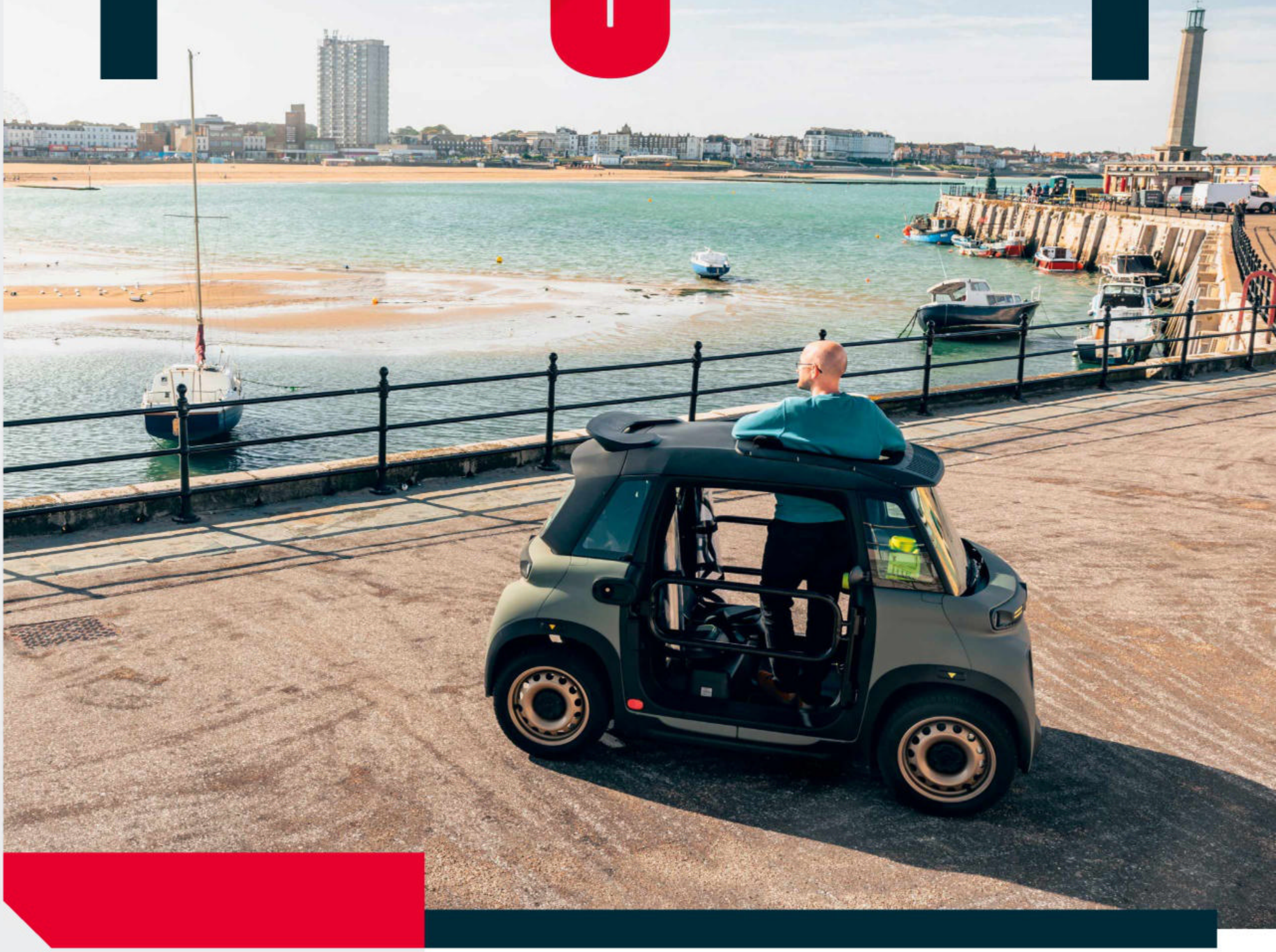
THE HOT LIST



CITY CARS

TG TIP
The £18k 3 trim has best blend of price and tech with heated seats and wireless phone charging

1

KIA PICANTO

PRICE: £15,845–£18,745

Fizzy, frugal and fun to drive, the tiny Picanto has been refined over three generations since 2003. The latest model got a welcome style injection when it was facelifted in 2023. There are surprisingly generous kit levels on offer, too

Aimed at: canny pensioners, new drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

HYUNDAI i10

PRICE: £16,380–£18,980

This tiny hatchback feels very grown up from behind the wheel, and the i10 is an eminently sensible city car choice with a strong spec. Great on holiday, too

Aimed at: car rental agencies

3

FIAT 500e

PRICE: £24,995–£33,995

One of the original retro tribute acts has matured into an EV while holding to its roots. Back's cramped, but there's still room for soft toys on the parcel shelf

Aimed at: retro hungry millennials

4

TOYOTA AYGO X

PRICE: £16,515–£20,540

What do you get if you cross a city car and an SUV? The Aygo X, apparently – much cooler than the old Aygo, but that X is only worth 11mm of ride height

Aimed at: the kids

5

CITROEN AMI

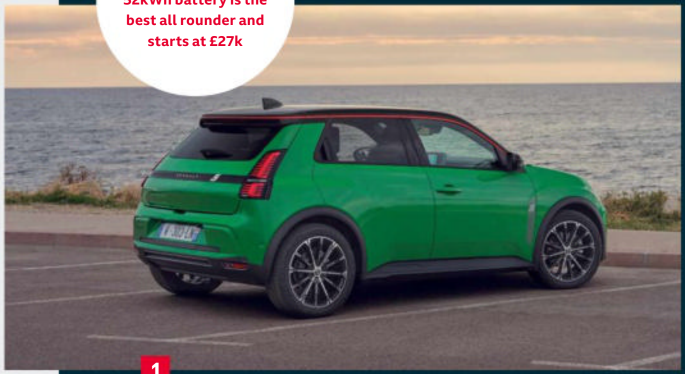
PRICE: £7,695–£8,095

Unlike the other cars here, the Ami really is just for the city, with a range of up to 46 miles and a top speed of 30mph. Still, quicker than getting the bus

Aimed at: antisocial commuters

SUPERMINIS

TG TIP
Techno trim with the 52kWh battery is the best all rounder and starts at £27k



1

RENAULT 5

PRICE: £22,995–£28,995

There's a delicate line to tread with a retro modern take on a stone cold classic, but Renault has managed it well with its new 5. Nods to the past abound, but that doesn't stop the supermini from being a great all round small electric car

Aimed at: retrospectives

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SUZUKI SWIFT

PRICE: £19,199–£21,549

Latest version of the Swift shows that cheap can still leave you feeling cheerful, especially with low monthly costs and the right kit levels

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

RENAULT CLIO

PRICE: £18,595–£24,895

The hybrid version works out a bit expensive, but the Clio is as solid a buy as it ever was – a proven package with a bit of added French flair

Aimed at: Nicole, papa, *toute la famille*

4

MINI COOPER

PRICE: £23,270–£39,120

New Mini takes the car on in all the right ways, with a sharp exterior design and tech-focused interior that's fun but still useful. Ride's a bit firm, though

Aimed at: young professionals/estate agents

5

SKODA FABIA

PRICE: £20,295–£26,195

No electric whizzery here, just a great all rounder with a solid 1.0-litre 3cyl petrol engine and some nifty interior touches (like the door umbrella)

Aimed at: sensible folks

FAMILY HATCHBACKS

TG TIP
Hybrid only, and stick to entry level **Elegance** trim for decent kit and best economy

1

HONDA CIVIC

PRICE: £35,005–£39,805

The strange thing about the Honda Civic is how wildly it veers from one generation to the next – you get a crazy one, then a sensible one, a crazy one... This current version is the sensible one, but that's not a bad thing – it might be conservative on the outside, but the interior is simply put together and to a high standard. You won't mind long family journeys, and you know that it'll all last for miles and miles. There's a strangely complex hybrid setup under the bonnet, but you needn't worry about all that, because the upshot is that the car drives and handles well enough, but won't cost you the earth in petrol bills. See, sometimes it does pay to be a little sensible. Though if you do want the Civic to be a bit crazy you can always go for the Type R version, which delivers in spades

Aimed at: spreadsheet users

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SKODA OCTAVIA

PRICE: £27,390–£40,390

There must be a few noses out of joint in the darkest corporate depths of the VW Group – of the host of cars based on the MkVIII Golf, the Skoda's the best

Aimed at: people with sensible shoes

3

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

PRICE: £27,760–£45,785

Long the benchmark in this sector, the crown has slipped a little in this eighth generation guise. We wouldn't count the Golf out for long though

Aimed at: everyone

4

MG4

PRICE: £26,995–£36,495

Popped up out of nowhere to become one of the easiest to recommend electric family hatchbacks around. Even looks good in orange

Aimed at: early adopters/taxi drivers

5

RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

PRICE: £33,995–£37,995

The strange thing about the latest Megane is that it doesn't excel anywhere, but overall adds up to a great family car that happens to be electric too

Aimed at: stylish school runs

BEST VAN BASED CAR

CITROEN BERLINGO

PRICE: from £23,250

Citroen didn't invent the idea of turning a van into a car, but the Berlingo perfected the format in the late 1990s. This third generation, facelifted in 2023, is not quite as down to earth with Citroen's focus on things like 'refinement' and 'comfort', but it still makes us smile

Aimed at: lifestyles

HOT HATCHES

TG TIP
Don't be tempted by the £3.8k **Carbon Pack**, it's expensive enough as it is...

1

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

PRICE: £50,050

Forget the slightly traditional setup of our 2022 Car of the Year, Honda's Type R follows the original hot hatch template fairly slavishly but it has kept it feeling brilliantly fresh. The electric ones have a lot of work to do if they want to compete

Aimed at: purists

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

TOYOTA GR YARIS

PRICE: £44,250-£60,000

The best Toyota ever? It really could be. The first version was a hoot to drive – fun at all speeds in all weathers. Updated one gets more bhp and an auto

Aimed at: cognoscenti

3

FORD FOCUS ST

PRICE: £37,705-£42,905

Practically Jurassic these days, but with a top notch drive this old stager can still show the youngsters where to go, particularly in ST Edition spec

Aimed at: budget purists

4

AUDI S3

PRICE: £47,550-£53,025

The S3 got much better when Audi chucked in the RS3's trick rear diff at the last facelift – this mature all-rounder parties hard but likes a bit of hummus

Aimed at: single car households

5

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

PRICE: £65,000

The hot hatch for the computer games generations is rammed full of gimmicks, but is still able to back it up where it really counts – on the road

Aimed at: gamers

CROSSOVERS

TG TIP
Entry level **Air** trim comes pretty well equipped – just go for the bigger battery

1

KIA EV3

PRICE: £32,995-£43,895

The Kianaissance continues apace, with an intriguing small electric effort that's finally delivering some of what we want from EVs. It's stylish, full of interesting details, about as fuss free as electric motoring gets and efficient too

Aimed at: punctual adopters

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

DACIA DUSTER

PRICE: £18,850-£26,850

If you're going to go back to basics then you really need to nail those essentials, which the Duster has managed effortlessly into its second generation

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

VOLVO EX30

PRICE: £32,850-£44,850

The EX30 is full of Scandi cool and delightfully simple to live with. Space is admittedly tight in the back, but the interior quality makes up for it

Aimed at: stylish families

4

FORD PUMA

PRICE: £26,350-£33,600

The UK's official bestseller has taken on the torch of the Fiesta as a decent little car with solid appeal across the board. Just don't mention the old one

Aimed at: everyone

5

HYUNDAI KONA

PRICE: £26,040-£33,165

Korean carmaker's bold design streak continues with the latest Kona, which remains a solid family car. EV's a great first toe in the electric waters

Aimed at: number crunchers

LUXURY SUVs

TG TIP
P510e hybrid is the way to go – in **Vogue SE** trim it's all the Range Rover you'll ever need

1

RANGE ROVER

PRICE: £104,025–£192,000

Arguably the original lifestyle SUV, the Range Rover has evolved massively since the 1970 original, developing into a luxury beast. The latest one hasn't just nailed the brief, it has set the benchmark for everyone else to follow

Aimed at: cash buyers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

VOLVO EX90

PRICE: £96,255–£99,950

The old XC90 was starting to get left behind, but the new EX90 has wrestled its way to the front of the post SUV queue while remaining as charming as ever

Aimed at: polo necks

3

FERRARI PUROSANGUE

PRICE: £313,360

Ferrari says this definitely isn't an SUV, but ironically with its sporty credentials it's probably the most SUV out of all the SUVs that have ever been made

Aimed at: posers

4

ROLLS-ROYCE CULLINAN

PRICE: £298,800–£342,600

Even Rolls-Royce had to follow the money and make an SUV. Fortunately you can't see what it looks like from the back seat – that's the place to enjoy it

Aimed at: old money

5

BMW iX

PRICE: £70,985–£124,605

This tech-laden electric SUV takes a different approach to luxury – it's still comfortable, but it dazzles with interesting materials and nice touches

Aimed at: tech VPs

OFF ROADERS

TG TIP
Just two trims here – pricier **First Edition** is the only way to get round headlights

1

LAND CRUISER

PRICE: £74,995–£79,995

The Toyota was always peerless off road, but it had everything except kerbside appeal – until this stylish retro version arrived. It might be criminal to watch a pedigree rockhopper waste away on the school run, but it gets slippery in Richmond sometimes

Aimed at: peacekeepers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

LAND ROVER DEFENDER

PRICE: £58,310–£160,800

Everyone had an opinion about the classic Defender, but no one was buying. Now it's selling at 10x the rate and the full fat OCTA takes it further than ever

Aimed at: school run mums

3

MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

PRICE: £136,690–£203,595

The looks of the G-Wagen are the same as they've ever been, but that masks the progress that's been made under the skin. The new electric one is fun

Aimed at: original gangsters

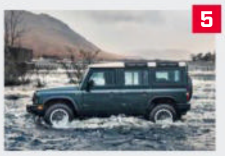
4

FORD RANGER

PRICE: £35,130–£62,557

Like a good pair of jeans, the Ranger is able to switch seamlessly from work to play, no wonder it's a trades favourite. A little bit large for parts of the UK though

Aimed at: sole traders



5

INEOS GRENADIER

PRICE: £65,015–£79,140

A passion project from a rich old billionaire who wanted a modernised version of his compromised old 4x4. Fair enough, seems to have managed it

Aimed at: old rich men

SPORTS CARS

TG TIP
Into driving? Carrera T. For everyday use, it's the base Carrera with Heritage Design interior

1

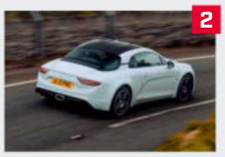
PORSCHE 911

PRICE: £99,800–£139,100

The definitive sports car, despite its inherent layout flaws, because it's been ruthlessly honed millimetre by millimetre over the past 70 years by people who really know what they're doing. Newly facelifted 992.2 version even has a hybrid option

Aimed at: heavyweights

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

ALPINE A110

PRICE: £54,490–£91,940

This stripped down French number has managed to take up the baton for feathery, beautifully handling sports cars since Lotus gave up trying

Aimed at: lightweights

3

TOYOTA GR86

PRICE: £32,495

The back to basics sports car is destined to be a future classic, and it's one of the best cars that Toyota's made (but it's no GR Yaris)

Aimed at: purists

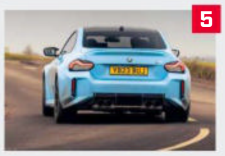
4

PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GTS

PRICE: £75,300

Sure, it's getting old, but the Cayman is one of those compelling driver's cars that we need to celebrate while they're still allowed to be on sale

Aimed at: B-road blasters



5

BMW M2

PRICE: £67,055

The latest version of the BMW M2 is more grown up than it used to be, but doesn't that apply to us all? It's a great daily driver that grows on you over time

Aimed at: wealthier purists

SUPERCARS

TG TIP
Don't have the £6,250 super lightweight carbon seats. Regular buckets are much better

1

McLAREN 750S

PRICE: £244,760

Launched in 2023 as a successor to the 720S, McLaren really stepped it up with this car – it's better to drive than its predecessor, but crucially it's also better to sit in and easier to operate. It even comes with Apple CarPlay...

Aimed at: rich Shanghai drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 296 GTB

PRICE: £241,550

People got nervous when they heard this Ferrari supercar would be a V6 hybrid... they needn't have worried, it all serves to make it a better drive

Aimed at: self-made business people

3

LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

PRICE: £446,742

There's hybrid tech in there, but there's also a socking V12 in what could very well be the best Lamborghini since the iconic 1960s Miura

Aimed at: high rollers

4

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

PRICE: £192,600

You've got to be a good driver to get the most out of the GT3 RS's repertoire, but Porsche has thrown everything it has at this racer for the road

Aimed at: amateur racers

5

McLAREN ARTURA

PRICE: £189,200

The conservative exterior serves to hide some big developments under the skin – ssh, but the Artura might even be a better daily driver than the 296 GTB

Aimed at: brave buyers

HYPERCARS

TG TIP
It'd be sacrilegious to change anything on Gordon's car, but he'll paint it how you like

1

GMA T.50

PRICE: £2.8 MILLION

Gordon Murray had already done it all with the McLaren F1 back in the 1990s, but you always sensed he had a bit more to prove. And here's the result, the car that shows lightning doesn't just strike twice, it'll do it exactly where Gordon tells it to. "The last great analogue supercar" was what Gordon Murray promised – and he's delivered it with relentless attention to detail and a dedication to the end prize. With the electric era almost upon us, we'll probably never see the likes of this pure, undiluted V12-powered monster ever again. It's not just the sum of Murray's knowhow and experience distilled into a ruthless hypercar, you can get something out of it without being an F1 driver, it's an enjoyable drive for whoever happens to be behind the wheel. Your move, everyone else

Aimed at: loaded enthusiasts

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

PAGANI UTOPIA

PRICE: £2.2 MILLION

In a truly utopian society we'd all be driving one of these. It's not bad for a third car – easy to forget that Pagani's been very discerning about its model lineup

Aimed at: tech billionaires

3

ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE

PRICE: £3 MILLION

The 'F1 car for the road' line has become a bit of a cliche, but the Valkyrie is certainly visceral and noisy enough to be considered that way

Aimed at: rich collectors

4

KOENIGSEGG JESKO

PRICE: £2.9 MILLION

Well it's named after the boss's dad, so it had to be a good car – and it is. Certainly worthy of a pat on the head, well done son

Aimed at: Monaco residents

5

BUGATTI CHIRON

PRICE: £3.2 MILLION

If the Veyron was the Volkswagen Group's moonshot, the Chiron reaches for the stars at warp speed. How do you follow this?

Aimed at: old money

BEST PHEV

MERCEDES-BENZ C300e

PRICE: from £52,110

We like the C-Class estate – it's a comfortable drive, a great cruiser and offers plenty of family practicality. The PHEV also has an EV range of up to 70 miles and can do fast charging if you need to top up on the move. Suddenly a PHEV makes a lot more sense

Aimed at: company drivers

BIG FAMILY CARS

TG TIP
It only costs £500 extra to go for the **7-seat** over the **5-seat** model – a no brainer

1

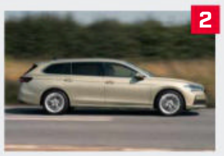
VW ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

PRICE: £59,545–£67,945

The ID.Buzz is not merely another retro face (that's the sugar on the electric pill), in many ways it's an innovative bit of family transport, especially in its seven-seater guise that finally releases the practicality the car needed

Aimed at: lifestyle families

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

PRICE: £36,995–£48,735

This car has always had to be good with a name like that, but it's hard to think of any other family estate out there that does a better job for the money

Aimed at: posh families

3

BMW i5 TOURING

PRICE: £69,945–£99,995

You wait ages for an electric family estate and then a brilliant one comes along all at once. Shows off all of BMW's electric knowhow and body control wizardry

Aimed at: the outside lane

4

HYUNDAI SANTA FE

PRICE: £46,775–£57,635

Stylish, well built, comfortable and quiet – not to mention loads of room inside for carrying people and stuff. Hyundai's hot streak continues

Aimed at: sensible families

5

DACIA JOGGER

PRICE: £18,400–£24,100

The Jogger is a masterpiece of cutting out the unnecessary (weight *and* money) while maintaining the fundamentals of a useful family estate

Aimed at: clever families

GRAND TOURERS

TG TIP
Got a dog? Aston's got you – the **Pet Pack** throws in a bed and a portable washer

1

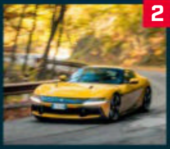
ASTON VANQUISH

PRICE: FROM £330,000

The Vanquish has been reborn – sounds a little grand, but the latest version has brought the car right up to date for its third incarnation. It mixes an exciting drive with genuine grand touring ability in a way that must have all its rivals quaking

Aimed at: secret agents

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

PRICE: £336,500

Ferrari has softened the edges off the 12Cilindri's forebears to create a car that's probably the most capable all rounder to have come out of Maranello

Aimed at: watch collectors

3

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

PRICE: £152,820–£257,700

If you had to drive really far there's probably no car you'd rather be in than the Continental GT. Except maybe a chauffeur driven Phantom of course

Aimed at: pipe smokers

4

PORSCHE 911 TURBO

PRICE: £200,600

The 911 range is like one of those Italian gelaterias with hundreds of flavours – seems excessive, but we love them all. Turbo might be the pick of the bunch

Aimed at: daily drivers

5

MASERATI GRANTURISMO

PRICE: £133,120–£179,950

A GT by name and a true GT by nature – this latest GranTurismo has avoided the temptation to go a little *too* sporty and nails the brief. EV's good too

Aimed at: tassled loafers

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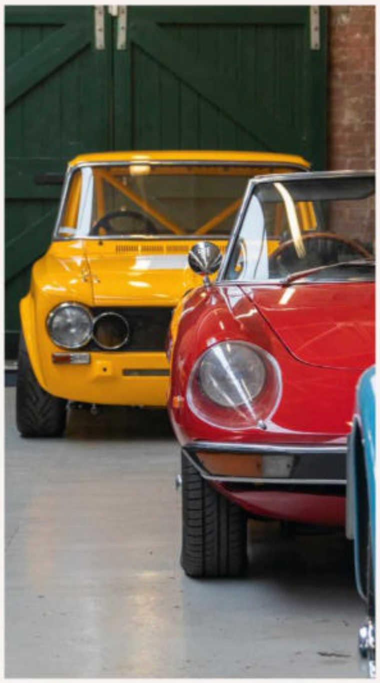

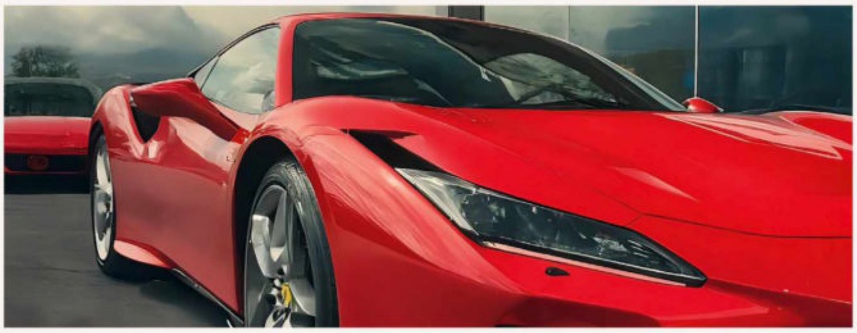

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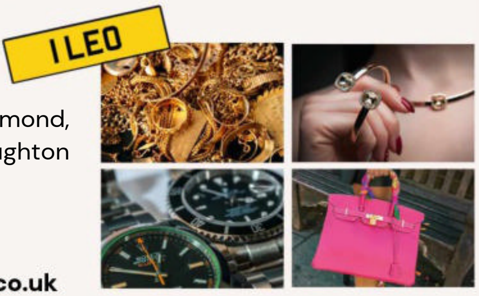

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SHORTLIST

CAR BUYING QUANDARY? SHORTLIST IS AT YOUR SERVICE

Dear *TopGear*,

I am a 53-year-old man with a bit of disposable income whose children describe him variously as a "total embarrassment" and "tragic waste of oxygen". What car can I buy that will impress them enough they'll respect me?

Dave, Berkshire

Our commiserations, Dave, children can be so ungrateful, but you've come to the right place. Buy any of these three cars and those youngsters will realise that you're actually a pretty swell guy. Our cars say so much about us, don't they? Whether it's a modified BMW, primordial 200,000 mile Kia Carens or a pink Fiat 500 with eyelashes on it – that's not the shortlist, Dave, don't go for any of those.

We'd probably avoid any sort of convertible too. It might be unfair considering we're only guessing what you look like, but soft tops are cringe in all but the safest pairs of hands and your children might have to work their way up to being seen quite so fulsomely in the same vicinity as their dear old dad. The SF90 Spider is no exception, everyone looks silly in a Ferrari, but rich and silly is a whole different ballgame. Plus the kids won't be getting anywhere near it after you've cut them off.

Your options...

Toyota GR Yaris From £42,250

The latest version of the GR Yaris might have yoinked up in price, but it's still as fun as a bag of squirrels. It's the connoisseur's hot hatch, but if the kids are into the environment you can also pretend it's the hybrid, they probably won't notice.

Polestar 2

From £44,950

A cool minimalist Scandi alternative to all that nonsense in America – give the kids one of its sustainability reports to read in the back, it's one of the few carmakers really trying to mitigate the effects of plundering the Earth for convenience.

Ferrari SF90 Spider From £418,233

At some point you just have to put yourself first, say enough is enough, get the house up for sale and buy yourself a Ferrari. Do the kids need an inheritance? Not with that attitude they don't. Looking after the planet? That'll be their problem.

WORDS: SAM BURNETT PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

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